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# **“Woodrow Wilson and the American Labour Movement”**

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis examines President Woodrow Wilson's relationship with the American labour movement, both the politically moderate American Federation of Labour (AFL) and the more radical Industrial Workers of the World (IWW).

This thesis will attempt to show that contrary to received wisdom the administration of Woodrow Wilson was not in fact a golden age for the American labour movement. The thesis will demonstrate how the reforms granted during this period which aided labour were frequently passed over Wilson's opposition or with nothing more than his passive support. It will also be shown that when Wilson cooperated with the AFL during the war, with places in the enlarged administration and with pressure on employers to make pro-labour concessions that it was only done for purely short-term reasons, to ensure labour cooperation - and that once the war had ended he withdrew that support.

This thesis will also show how the suppression of the IWW during the war was not solely the product of that emergency, but that the desire to do so actually preceded the beginning of the conflict.

These conclusions have been reached after studying President Wilson's collected papers and the views of many of his contemporaries, and having read all the accepted leading secondary sources covering the period in question.

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# WOODROW WILSON AND THE AMERICAN LABOUR MOVEMENT

## PREFACE

Many leading American historians have argued that Samuel Gompers and the American Federation of Labor (AFL) achieved more by way of legislative recognition under the Democratically led administrations of Woodrow Wilson than they had ever done under other administrations.

This thesis will, however, attempt to show that the American labour movement was in actual fact in a structurally weaker position at the close of Wilson's second administration than it was at the beginning of his term of office in 1913.

Although beset by many enemies, both external and internal, in 1913 the AFL was still an inherently strong and resolute organisation. Running alongside it were the Socialist Party of America (SPA) - the fastest ever growing party in American history and the first socialist group to attract large numbers of native-born Americans; and the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) - a syndicalist dominated industrial union movement trying, with some success, to rival the AFL in the labour world.

Yet at the close of the second Wilson administration the SPA and IWW were broken and the AFL had retreated back into its pre-war bastions and was politically neutered. This was no accident. The SPA and IWW were broken by government repression and the AFL was rolled back by employer hostility and the withdrawal of government backing in the post-war period.

This thesis will show that Wilson was far from being an active liberal and that he had no real understanding of, or great sympathy for, organised labour; and that his conversion to progressivism in the 1907-1913 period was one of language and not one of substance.

It will also be shown how in his early years as president, certainly up until 1914, Wilson actively tried to prevent the spread of advanced progressive and labour doctrines into legislation. This thesis will show how it was only political expediency that made him support pro-labour measures in the post-1914 period, and that his accommodation with the AFL during the war was only done for short term reasons. For all his beguiling jargon his fundamental attitudes remained substantially unaltered as the post-war repression of radicals would demonstrate.

It will be shown throughout this thesis that, of those labour measures passed, the majority owed little to Wilson; that his support when given frequently tended to be only passive; and that much of the new legislation tended to be of only a symbolic nature effecting nothing of any real significance. The problems that prompted the AFL political initiative and the Bill of Grievances in 1906 remained substantially unrectified in 1921 when Wilson left office.

Perhaps most important of all, this thesis will attempt to show how the Wilson administration reined in the SPA and IWW. The seeds of their repression in the second administration were actually sown in the first term, and it was only the lack of a legal pretext that prevented action sooner.

Thus, far from being an active liberal and a friend of labour, it will be shown that Wilson was actually afraid of the organising efforts of working people, and that his attitude towards them was not one of benign friendship but was actually one of repressive tolerance. By their inability to understand this Samuel Gompers and the AFL not only aided in the repression of their more radical union and political associates, but also retarded the development of the American labour movement by many years.

This is the story that will be told.

## CHAPTER ONE

### AMERICAN LABOUR - AN INTRODUCTION

This chapter will examine the influences that played a part in the formation of the American Federation of Labor (AFL) and affected the way in which the organisation worked. Samuel Gompers as the movement's first leader had a crucial role in this development and so this chapter will open with an examination of his influence. There will then be an analysis of the movement's internal and external enemies, all of whom worked hard to undermine the organisation. The chapter will close with an examination of how the court's reinterpretation of the Sherman Anti-Trust Act pushed a previously reluctant AFL into taking a political stand, and why the movement developed a tentative alliance with the Democratic party in preference to other possible courses of action.

#### The Role Of Samuel Gompers

The principal architect of the AFL was Samuel Gompers, who led and shaped the organisation during its first forty years. He was born in London's East End in 1850 of Dutch-Jewish stock. His father was a cigar maker by trade, a profession his son also entered. In 1863 the family moved to America. After a short flirtation with radicalism he became interested in the union movement, which he felt was a purer expression of working class solidarity. The cigar shops of America were hotbeds of political protest: Gompers acknowledged this when saying "from this little group (the New York Cigar Makers' Union) came the purpose and the initiative that finally resulted in the American labor movement. We did not 'create' the movement ... but we did create the techniques and formulate the fundamentals that guide unions"(1). Throughout his life "the best possible conditions obtainable for the workers"(2) was the light that guided him. In 1912 whilst speaking before the Commission on Industrial Relations he observed that the role of the AFL was "to work along the line of least resistance; to accomplish the best results in improving the conditions of the working people, men, women, children, today, tomorrow and tomorrow's tomorrow, and making each day a better day than the one before. That is the guiding principle, and the philosophy of the labor movement"(3). This lack of ultimate ends and a concentration on "bread and butter" issues was not just Gompers' theory, in time it came



to represent mainstream AFL policy. It was certainly in line with Gompers' words to the House Lobby Investigating Committee in 1913: "it is our duty to live our lives as workers in the society in which we live, and not to work for the downfall, or the destruction or the overthrow of that society"(4). Gompers never actually controlled any large union, and for most of his presidency was faced with bitter opposition. His power rested ultimately upon his influence, intelligence and personality. His forty year survival shows a unique talent for compromise and negotiation. Gompers was highly typical of the kind of men who came together to form the AFL. A great many of them were, like him, of immigrant stock. A large proportion of them were also well schooled in Marxist theories and were happy to accept the dominance of things economic over things political. Trained in the skilled crafts many of these men found work in small workshops, places where craftsmen could exert a controlling effect through their manipulation of work practices. Their predominantly immigrant status, their belief in the primacy of economic matters and their craftsmens' power all helped to give the union structures they devised a distinctive shape.

### The Organisation Of The AFL

Hoping to work for realisable objectives in the workplace, the AFL leadership devised a political programme that was in itself a reaction against earlier labour adventurism, calling as it did for the protection of funds; the adoption of uniform apprenticeship rules; the encouragement of arbitration; legislation for the inspection of mines, factories and workshops; and for laws making employers responsible for industrial safety. These were the kind of measures acceptable to stably employed craftsmen, and showed their worries, preoccupations and prejudices. Gompers and his co-leaders had the decidedly modest aim of bringing industrial legislation and practices in America up to the level of England, and of securing union rights as they had been achieved by lobbying at Westminster. Consequently the structure of the AFL was consciously modelled on the TUC. Many of the unions which joined the AFL were not in themselves new, it was the relationship between them, this new federation that was the novelty. The cooperation of national and international unions within the AFL was secured by giving them representation at annual conventions on the basis of their membership and the freedom to act independently in their own industrial spheres. The autonomy given member unions obviously affected the movement's strength, but was the only way to get many unions

to affiliate, for as Gompers told M.P. McBryde, "the AFL is a voluntary organization. The resolutions or platforms adopted by it at its conventions are expressions of the sentiments and demands of the majority of the workers affiliated. The resolutions and platforms adopted cannot be imposed on any affiliated organization"(5). As a result of this, the bulk of the movement's decision making was not done in convention but at local level, thus giving unions maximum freedom.

In addition to the president and his secretary-treasurer the AFL had eight vice-presidents graded in seniority, all of whom were elected annually. The personnel of this executive council seldom changed. These men tended to be elected on a personal basis rather than because of the strength of the union they represented, their longevity in office showing their ability to succeed in the field of inter-union politics. The primary units within the AFL were their national unions, organisations distinguished by their claim to an exclusive jurisdiction within an area of industry rather than by their success in actually recruiting all the workers therein. Member unions were only willing to remain affiliated as long as he respected their autonomy. As a result the president and executive council were never given any real power to interfere in the internal affairs of member unions, and so many unions were permitted to discriminate against negroes, carry out racist attacks on Asians, operate restrictive practices, and to remain indifferent to the plight of the unskilled. Gompers and his co-leaders' main purpose remained that of mediation in strikes between unions and employers, and to lobby state legislatures and Congress for pro-labour measures.

### AFL Opponents - The SPA And The IWW

The years 1904-1911 were particularly hard ones for the AFL. A nationwide depression was compounded by an aggressive open-shop campaign and the courts putting them under intense pressure. Whilst having to weather these storms the movement was also being challenged by socialists calling upon the movement to endorse independent political action, and a dualist threat in the shape of the Industrial Workers of the World.

The socialist presence in America had grown steadily during the nineteenth century with much impetus coming from European immigrants. Socialism was so strong among European workers that many native born Americans considered it to be both alien and unAmerican. It would be a gross over-simplification, however, to think that all socialists were non-American. As John Laslett shows, large segments of the American radical and socialist movements were in fact native born, their adoption of socialist or other radical credos being linked to unique conditions and circumstances in their geographical areas or trades. What was so remarkable about the Socialist Party of America (SPA) was indeed its strength among native born Americans. In 1912 only 13% of SPA members were in foreign language federations (6).

Many radicals, whether they were socialists, anarchists or syndicalists, supported the union movement and hoped for advantages from it in turn. There were obvious differences among these radicals over the best methods to follow with the "opportunists" favouring "boring from within" - entering the AFL and changing the direction in which it was moving - while the "impossibilists" favoured "dual unions" - the establishment of an opposing movement organised along industrial lines. The SPA embraced both methods at different times. Clearly radical influence was growing as some of the AFL's largest unions were electing socialist leaders and delegates, in fact, one half of the United Mine Workers delegates to the 1908 annual convention were actively socialist. In the frontier areas of the West, socialism, often of the more violent kind, was common; although this was often simply a reaction against over-cautious AFL methods.

True to its business union philosophy the AFL held to a policy of refusing affiliation to organisations which expounded a political cause. Socialists, however, believing that their party was different to all others, disagreed with this and felt that they deserved special treatment, not that the AFL hierarchy ever agreed. Most of the demands advanced by the SPA were actually supported by the AFL, where they differed was over the socialist calls for the common ownership of the means of production and for independent political action supported by the union movement. Their agitation of this issue cost Gompers his leadership of the movement for a year and probably accounts for much of his antipathy thereafter. As he once said himself, "I say broadly and openly that there is not a noble hope that a socialist may have that I do not hold as my ideal [but] .... our methods are different"(7). Many socialists eventually refused to work with him, holding him personally responsible for many of the

AFL's more reactionary attitudes, which is perhaps unfair on Gompers and short sighted on their part as the AFL was probably genuinely closer to representing labour than they were. Gompers' attitude to socialists was one of discriminating opposition and was linked primarily to whether people were workers and unionists. He despised Daniel De Leon of the Socialist Labor Party (SLP) almost as much as he despised the views he expounded, but De Leon was an ex-university lecturer and thus not a worker to Gompers. He was never as hostile to Eugene Debs even though he was instrumental in the setting up of the American Railroad Union and played a leading role in the American Labor Union and the IWW. Gompers believed that "the movement often called a class movement is often nothing more than a party movement"(8), and so he worked hard to stop them interfering in AFL affairs. He actually welcomed debates on socialism "because it armed our fellow unionists with the arguments to best defend the unions' position against the aggressive onslaughts of the so-called socialists"(9). To a certain extent by blowing up the socialist threat he could make his own position more secure, convinced as he was that any endorsement of independent political action would mean an endorsement of socialism, as they were the group best organised to capitalise on such a move. He personally saw to it that the movement came out against all forms of political action, "that party politics, whether they be democratic, republican, socialistic, populist, prohibition or any other, should have no place in this convention"(10). He worked hard to have all political activists subordinate their political beliefs to the best interests of the AFL for "regardless of what the end of the labor movement as a movement between classes may be, they (political beliefs) must remain in the background and we must subordinate our convictions and our views and our acts to the general good"(11).

Even with the AFL antagonistic towards them between 1905 and 1915 the SPA gained greatly in strength. Their rising influence was perhaps not due solely to the attractiveness of their programme but was also linked to government, judicial and industrial opposition to organised labour. During this period the SPA, a curious mixture of Americanised socialists with no real grounding in Marxist theories, intellectuals pushing for gradualist political change, and socialists more interested in unionism, was the fastest growing party ever seen in American history; between 1905 and 1912 its membership rose from 10,000 to 118,000. Despite its many internal divisions, all sections of SPA opinion were united in the call for a regeneration of the AFL.

In Chicago in 1905 another threat to the organising efforts of the AFL materialised in the shape of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW). Elements from the Western Federation of Miners (WFM), SLP, SPA and American Labor Union all came together to develop the IWW. The movement was to become an interesting synthesis of socialism, industrial unionism and revolutionary tactics. Gompers had an informant at the Chicago conference who said "many of the delegates who seem to be taking a prominent part in the gathering represent no one but themselves and are not even members of trades unions .... I have a number of acquaintances who are members of unions affiliated to the AFL, and who are socialists, but none of them are representing their unions; indeed a number of them are bitter about this new venture"(12). Like other radical movements the IWW was soon plagued by battles between theorists and pragmatists. Gompers' informant saw the whole thing as being "satisfactory from the standpoint of the AFL"(13), although such complacency proved to be premature. The Steunenberg trial, where leading WFM officers were accused of bombing ex-governor Steuenenberg, had a shattering effect on the IWW. The case made the WFM moderate their behaviour and played a part in the WFM leaving the IWW, which did much to cripple the movement in its early days depriving it as it did of its more stable hands, men who knew a lot about practical union organisation. With the loss of the WFM the socialist and syndicalist elements remaining fought for supremacy, and with the defection of De Leon in 1908 the syndicalists won. IWW membership rose swiftly, but the movement did not spring to national prominence until 1910 when the "free speech" campaigns drew it much publicity. With the victory in Lawrence it became an object of hostility and fear almost unparalleled in American history, it soon replaced the SPA as the nation's bogeyman.

While setting out to supplant the AFL the IWW had little success in recruiting AFL members, the biggest successes were made among the unorganised workers, men long neglected by the AFL. The IWW recruited amongst migratory farmworkers, Western loggers, textile workers, illiterate Southern whites and new immigrants. The IWW, however, did little in the way of systematically organising these workers, instead they tried to concentrate on providing a dynamic and sympathetic leadership, especially during strikes. As they claimed to be organising for a revolution they did not see the need to develop a conventional union organisation. They actually scorned conventional union procedures, fund raising and full-time officials. They had little time for collective bargaining, trade agreements, grievance machinery and mediation in general. They hoped instead to unite all workers in one central organisation, without distinction, thus in contrast to the AFL they organised themselves into thirteen

departments along industrial union lines covering all possible job types. In nearly every major way the IWW attempted to present the movement as the antithesis of the AFL. Their early propaganda coups and their growing membership showed that they were not without support.

### **AFL Opponents - Employers' Violence And The Open Shop Campaign**

Opposition to the AFL was also strong among employers, many of whom felt that they must control every area of the industrial process. This was believed to be especially important where skilled craft unions had a powerful presence, as through "union rules" crafts could affect other areas of production. To combat this employers used a variety of methods, from violence to covert anti-union practices. Many employers felt that unions and moves to enforce a closed shop were in themselves unAmerican and felt justified in using violence against employees. Henry Frick of US Steel was happy to announce that "I can hire one half of the working class to kill the other half"(14). With employers voicing such opinions it is hardly surprising that America has one of the bloodiest histories of labour violence: between 1870 and 1937 there were over 700 deaths and thousands of serious injuries in labour disputes. Robert Goldstein can find "no apparent relationship between the degree of violence employed and workers' provocation"(15). What is so striking about this violence is that American labour often seen as being the least ideological in the industrial world. Richard Hofstadter and Michael Wallace clearly felt that "the rate of industrial violence in America is striking in the light of the fact that no major American labor organization has ever advocated violence as a policy ... with a minimum of ideologically motivated class conflict the United States has somehow had a maximum of industrial violence"(16).

Thus what happened under the Wilson administration during and after the war was no new thing, Wilson and his subordinates in their dealings with the AFL and the IWW adhered to a policy that Herbert Marcuse has called "repressive tolerance," which involved granting minor reforms to deflect basic criticisms, whilst utilising the mechanisms of "political repression" when labour dissent or opposition stepped outside the bounds the administration set for it. William Preston is correct to say that "union identity was difficult, if not dangerous, and the powers in control had the wherewithal to turn the heat on if unionism gained a significant degree of influence"(17).

The depression of 1903-1904 helped employers as it turned a labour shortage into a labour surplus and gave employers an opportunity to mount an assault upon the closed shop. In 1903 David Parry and a group of mostly mid-Western metal manufacturers took over control of the National Association of Manufacturers (NAM), which had been formed in 1895, and put it on a more overtly anti-union footing. Parry believed that unions were inherently socialist, that they countenanced violence and restricted output, "that it (the AFL) did not place its reliance upon reason and justice, but on strikes boycotts and coercion. It denies to those outside its ranks the industrial right to dispense of their labor as they see fit"(18). NAM laid the blame for all disturbances at the door of labour. Thousands of people believed their propaganda, including Woodrow Wilson who used NAM material for his 1909 Baccalaureate address at Princeton, and who was a personal friend of many of its more active members, including the McCormicks of International Harvester. Wilson's close friend President Charles Eliot of Harvard went so far as to call strikebreakers "a very good kind of modern hero"(19). In 1908 the National Council for Industrial Defence (NCID) became the chief spokesman for all the anti-union interests. The organisation was extremely successful at lobbying Congress and was to do a great deal to impede the passage of anti-injunction measures and other pro-labour legislation. The NCID made AFL lobbying in Washington almost a waste of time. A congressional committee in 1913 found an organisation of anti-union employers whose scope and effectiveness eclipsed all the other lobbying interests combined.

In 1904 an official at International Harvester reported, "it would seem that we are in a more favorable position today to have a fight with labor, if necessary, than we have been for some time past or are likely to be for some time to come"(20). Wage cuts were forced through in almost all industrial sections, and there was an acceleration in the introduction of new machinery and work procedures. The immediate result of all this was internal warfare among unions, with much AFL time wasted in reconciling differences.

Employers' main grievances against unions remained: closed shops, boycotts, limitations on the right to hire and fire, violence during strikes, corrupt practices, rules affecting output, resistance to the use of new machinery, and the limitation of apprentices. The AFL did little to come to terms with employers on these issues; although when left to their own devices few employers did much either. In their efforts to defeat unions employers encouraged the use of yellow dog contracts, played on the rivalries of different ethnic groups and unions, employed

spies, had agitators fired and kept blacklists of known radicals. Pressure was even applied to fellow employers to get them to join NAM or an umbrella agency like the American Anti-Boycott Association (AABA). Parry supported all of this “since the principles and demands of organized labor are absolutely untenable to those believing in the individualistic social order, an attitude of conciliation would mean an attitude of compromise .... the greatest danger lies in the recognition of the union .... a government cannot stand, or its free institutions survive if the Gompers - Debs ideals of liberty and freedom of speech are allowed to dominate”(21). Gompers must have been shocked to hear that people felt that he and Eugene Debs had any kind of working relationship! Elements of the press also backed Parry. Colonel G.B.M. Harvey's **North American Review**, an early backer of Wilson, said “the first duty of legitimate power is to emancipate the individual worker from the tyranny of his class. The individual worker should not be permitted to commit moral suicide by surrendering his liberty to the control of his fellow workers”(22).

### The National Civic Federation And Welfarism

In an effort to silence some of his critics, and also win a measure of recognition and respectability from powerful employing interests, Gompers accepted an invitation to join the National Civic Federation (NCF). This was an organisation bringing together employing and labour interests to help foster industrial peace and progress. Gompers served as a vice-president from 1900 to 1916. As Marguerite Green shows, a certain amount of ambiguity existed as to the NCF's short and long-term objectives, especially as regards the relationship of labour to business, and the specific industrial and political needs it was hoping to fulfil. An early leader, Senator Marcus Hanna, saw its mission thus: “my plan is to have organized labor Americanized in the best sense, and thoroughly educated to an understanding of its responsibilities and in this way to make it the ally of the capitalist, rather than a foe with which to grapple”(23). Ralph Easley, its life long secretary, felt that “I want to get the labor end of our committee with you (Hanna) some place where you can read a riot act to them and make them understand what they have to do to keep the friendship of you and your friends. They will take anything from you because they believe in you”(24). All of this was designed to help the more conservative union leader both know his place and beat off his radical foes.



Under Hanna the NCF did have some success, especially in the field of collective bargaining, with all the interested parties working hard to promote the value of trade agreements. It was not without its enemies, however; Henry Frick, J.P.Morgan and J.D.Rockefeller were all extremely anti-NCF simply because it had union members, the very reason Andrew Carnegie supported it and underwrote its costs. Curiously many anti-union employers supported it financially whilst not recognizing unions in their own plants. NAM wrote it off as an apologist for the AFL. Equally, many socialists opposed it, as they saw it as an attempt to pull the teeth of labour militancy. There is no real evidence that Gompers or any other AFL member was constrained in their union duties by it. Clearly socialists were just as keen to cooperate with employers on a daily basis as were those who were NCF members; socialists' main objection seems to have been that they were against a formal admission that they should cooperate. The NCF did some meaningful work in lobbying for labour legislation and by diluting some of the hostility of anti-union employers to collective bargaining. There are similarities between the goals of the NCF and those of anti-union employers - both were protests against labour extremism. The NCF was perhaps using more sophisticated methods but it was just as bent on restraining the more aggressive unionist. It certainly had no tolerance for the strategic or sympathetic strike, nor did it help labour to organise any non-union industry.

Employers were sophisticated enough to attack the AFL from many different fronts. Some used welfarism to undermine unions. Welfare measures varied greatly, but were aimed at three major areas: improving conditions within the plant, wage policies, and the organisation of workers' free time activities. Nelson and Campbell see welfarism and Taylorism as the two main prongs of the employer assault on labour during the Progressive Era. Taylorism, which concentrated upon timing activities in the pursuit of ever greater efficiency, working inside the plant, and welfarism concentrating on outside activities. In so doing they somewhat neglect the supporting activities of organisations like NAM, and the periodic bouts of coercion used to keep workers docile. Certainly though one of the major aims of welfarism was to undermine unions. At an NCF Welfare Department meeting in November 1904 an employer spoke of his programme as being designed solely to "get rid of the union"(25). Charles McCormick of International Harvester claimed welfarism "should endeavor to secure for the employee just what he most desires from the union. It should secure for him the results which labor organizations declare are their base objects, namely higher wages and shorter hours"(26). Thus welfarism was from its very beginning an overtly anti-union operation. The AFL's attitude to welfarism is best illustrated by John Sullivan of the typographical union in his

pamphlet, **The Trades Unions' Attitude Towards Welfare Work**. He felt that welfarism actually aided existing union programmes and so was laudable, especially in areas outside AFL control, thus not recognizing the threat it posed. The surrender of this unorganised area by the AFL gave employers a virtual free hand, and was to cost the movement dearly later.

### American Labour And The Courts

The power of the courts in the sphere of industrial relations has traditionally provided American unionists with few rewards for political action. As the courts were allowed to create a legal framework to stabilise and facilitate an individualistic competitive capitalism they were soon accepted as an alternative forum of public policy making in the country. The judiciary had a greater part to play than the executive or legislative branches of government in defining public policies towards organised labour. They could do this by endorsing, or more commonly, restraining the policy initiatives and preferences of other areas of government. That being the case unionists' longstanding commitment to collective action has on occasion inadvertently set the labour movement on a collision course with the courts. Recognizing labour's right to collective action required considerably more than minor adjustments to existing doctrine. Hoping to avoid hostile court action the AFL adopted a strategy of anti-statist voluntarism. With hostility in the courts and legislative victories proving traditionally fleeting, the shop floor seemed to be a more fertile ground for union mobilisation.

The AFL was soon disappointed for with increasing frequency employers used the courts in their fight against unions. Injunctions soon proved to be the most effective way of restraining employees, because they provided immediate relief during a dispute, and also avoided recourse to a jury who might have been more willing to sympathise with strikers than would a judge. By a curious irony the most effective type of injunction for use against unions turned out to be one issued under the umbrella of the Sherman Anti-Trust Act 1890, which declared illegal any combination or conspiracy in restraint of trade. Injunctions had been previously used against labour, but were deemed to be of doubtful legality, and so were restricted mainly to stopping strikers committing acts already prescribed by the criminal law. Between 1890 and 1894 federal courts used injunctions more frequently, largely by linking their issuance to the

Sherman Act or the Interstate Commerce Act. The judges who heard labour cases under Sherman could initially find no common law tradition to guide them in interpreting and enforcing it, as union existence and striking appeared to be acceptable under the act. The situation changed in 1893 when defendants accused of conducting a general strike in New Orleans had their strike ended by an injunction issued under Sherman. Judge Billings conceded that ordinary strikes were lawful, but added that in New Orleans workers had used violence and intimidation. Thus he believed that their actions were a combination in restraint of trade as their general strike restrained trade outside the strike sphere. In 1894 Debs' ARU strike against the Pullman company was broken by an injunction issued under the Sherman Act. In his judgement on the strike Judge Woods relied on Billings, and felt that labour could be included under Sherman in three ways: restraint of trade, combinations in restraint of trade, and conspiracies. From then on the theories of Billings and Woods became the basis of decisions in other cases involving labour. A circuit judge in Missouri issued a preliminary injunction against the officers of a union citing Billings. Judge Morrow in California when investigating strike activity in the state used the Billings ruling when he said that a principle had been established that strikes accompanied by violence and intimidation were proscribed by Sherman. AFL lobbying in Washington brought no relief, leaving many AFL officers to conclude that injunctions were actually beginning to weaken the legal status of unions, for increasingly the legality of strikes was being linked to their purpose. In 1922 Gompers told the Senate Committee on Manufactures in answer to Senator Walsh's questions, "Do you go so far as to say that the judiciary has not any sympathy, or is highly educated towards the rights of labor?" that, "I am certain of that sir!" (27), showing how badly affected he was by the experiences of the early twentieth century.

In 1903 the situation worsened when D.E. Loewe and Company of Danbury, Connecticut sued the Hatters Union under Sherman for triple damages for losses incurred as a result of a boycott of their products. In February 1908 the Supreme Court upheld the prosecution and later a jury allowed the full cost of the damages claimed. Following this the Bucks Stove and Range Company initiated another boycott action. This directly affected Gompers for the firm secured an injunction against him personally when he included the company on the "unfair list" of the *American Federationist* which he edited and published. Gompers ignored the injunction and was cited for contempt of court. He was sentenced to a term of imprisonment, never actually served, but it hung menacingly over him until it was quashed on a technicality in 1914. These two cases were pushed by men active in the campaign against labour, Loewe helped form

the AABA, and J.W. Van Cleave, the president of Bucks Stove, was Parry's successor in the NAM. Also in 1908 the Supreme Court invalidated the important section of the Erdman Act of 1898 which made illegal discrimination against unionists on the railways.

Gompers was convinced that the Danbury Hatters ruling would jeopardize all attempts by unions to establish collective bargaining agreements in any industry. In a memorial presented to the leader of the House, Gompers insisted that the case placed the whole labour movement in jeopardy. He told Speaker Cannon that "it is indeed true that under the decision our very organized existence is unlawful"(28). Gompers alarm puzzled many as there was nothing in Judge Fuller's summing up on the legality of trade agreements. Even so Gompers still maintained that federal justices might now use the Danbury decision to declare the establishment of industry wide trade agreements to be unlawful combinations, and in so doing condemn almost all forms of labour activism. This was an alarmist view, but it cannot be simply dismissed as a figment of Gompers' imagination coming as it did on top of earlier anti-labour decisions. Gompers steadfastly maintained that the inclusion of unions within the ambit of Sherman was a perversion of the intent of its drafters, and he was quite right to do so. He was convinced that the Danbury ruling could be taken to imply that collective bargaining was an unlawful object for labour to engage in. "The court in its decision takes the very evidence of the successful cooperation of the employers with their employees to maintain industrial peace as the evidence that these combinations or agreements are in restraint of trade"(29), and as almost all actions by unions promoted this fundamental aim he believed that almost all could now be outlawed. Seth Low of the NCF believed that Gompers was incorrect in his analysis, but did concede that "nevertheless the leaders of the labor movement were convinced that the right to strike, to combine, and to make trade agreements was in jeopardy and no assurance from the legal fraternity would make them believe otherwise"(30). Clearly though the Danbury judgement showed that the courts now believed that Sherman applied with equal force to labour as it did to capital. "The Supreme Court had tended to divide closely in Sherman cases involving business, but with the Danbury Hatters case and in other Sherman cases involving labor, it acted with unanimity in turning the act labor."(31)

Danbury Hatters cost the AFL the use of the boycott and also made individual members responsible for the actions of their unions. The Hitchman Coal and Coke Company versus Mitchell case put further heavy obstacles in the way of unions when organising workers. So

much so that many unionists were beginning to feel that, in the battle between capital and labour, the courts had gone over to the employers. These reverses helped to strengthen the hand of the radicals in the AFL, they began to claim with greater force, and seeming justification, that it was proof of government and court bias, and that the only answer was independent political action.

Gompers and the AFL leadership realised that the AFL's traditional methods were failing to meet these challenges and that more radical methods were needed to give the movement some relief from its attackers.

Thus as the Progressive Era began that small section of labour that was organised was dominated by the AFL. Their philosophy was the product of three decades of cautious growth. They entered this new era beset by enemies on all sides, both external and internal, but with the hope that the change in public attitudes and the qualified approval of the Democrats might herald better days ahead.

### **The AFL Response - The Bill Of Grievances**

Any AFL programme to secure relief from the injunction threat was hampered by the fact that "our affiliates are guaranteed autonomy and independence. If they deem independent political action advisable, or if they desire to take political action by which to pledge candidates for public office, to stand by the advocates of labor measures and reward them, or to punish at the polls those who are inimical to their interests, these are matters entirely delegated to each organization"(32). Not only was the AFL's traditional autonomy a hindrance but Gompers was also aware of the growing socialist presence in the movement and was worried that any acceptance of independent action would not only be objectionable to those members who were active in the two main parties, but that it might be tantamount to a recognition of socialism.

Another reason for caution was the importance of state legislatures to the movement. Many matters could be adequately solved at a local level. State federations had responsibility for drafting legislation for these bodies and then lobbying for its adoption. Not only were they keen to retain this power but it had also produced many successes. Thus the AFL leadership felt that the policies followed by State federations and city centrals were the right ones, and could be equally profitable on a national level. The occasional successes these local actions produced, despite labour's overall numerical weakness, made the AFL hierarchy realise that local politicians were frequently more susceptible to well organised pressure group activity than they were to party orders, which could be to the movement's advantage if it could be replicated nationally. It seemed to offer the AFL the hope of success without expense, and it also had the additional advantage of keeping the socialists out of power within the movement, which an endorsement of independent political action might otherwise entail.

Throughout their existence the AFL had actually evaluated numerous ways of securing representation: electing unionists to office without the formality of a separate political organisation; endorsing the SPA as their political agency; forming a separate labour party; allying themselves to other groups to create a larger party, such as the People's Party; or supporting the existing parties when they promised labour legislation. They wavered uneasily between these methods but in 1906 after much internal struggle they endorsed the last strategy and the organisation decided to support their friends and punish their enemies at the ballot box. Gompers was instrumental in this decision, for while he considered lobbying to be a proper activity he remained totally opposed to independent electoral action. He knew that most AFL members voted for the two main parties, and that many union officers were party officials, and so he felt that any call for their vote would fall on deaf ears. He merely hoped that he could stop people from blindly voting the party ticket. Thus he hoped that he had devised a political strategy for AFL problems, one that would mollify members while causing the least political dissension. Clearly, Gompers' endorsement of this strategy and the 1906 "Bill of Grievances" was as much prompted by his own personal ideology as it was by the belief that he could secure relief in no other way. He always believed that "securing the enactment of a law does not mean the solution of the problem as I learned in my legislative experience. The power of the courts to pass upon the constitutionality of a law so complicates reform by legislation as to seriously restrict the effectiveness of that method" (33).

In 1900 the TUC and the Independent Labour Party had formed a Labour Representation Committee (LRC) to lobby Westminster for labour reforms. In 1905 they succeeded in electing 29 MPs. This left a great impression on the AFL. The following year the AFL set up an LRC of their own and submitted to Congress a "Bill of Grievances". Among its demands were: an eight hour day for Federal employees; restrictions on the manufacture and sale of convict produced goods; limits on immigration; and most importantly - limitations to be placed on the use of injunctions in labour disputes. President Roosevelt and Congress both ignored it. Thus the AFL attempted to carry out their threat to vote strategically in the 1906 congressional elections. It was not a great success; while the Republican majority in the House was reduced, this was due to factors other than labour pressure, if anything the House was more anti-labour than before.

During the 1908 presidential campaign the AFL again submitted a list of demands to both parties along the lines of the "Bill of Grievances". The Republicans again ignored it, and snubbed the AFL by picking William Taft, known as "the father of the injunction," as their candidate. The Democrats, however, took the bulk of the programme on board, giving Gompers the opportunity to write the labour planks in their platform. The fact that the Democrats had been out of national office since 1894 may, in part, have accounted for their new interest in labour issues. AFL political assertiveness clearly served primarily to forge an alliance of sorts between respectable organised labour and the Democrats. The Democrats had good reason to seek union support for as a minority party nationally they needed allies wherever they could be found. Whilst still not fully endorsing the Democrats, Gompers and the AFL hierarchy vigorously attacked the Republicans. Socialists both inside and outside the movement were disappointed with this new approach. Their disappointment became even greater in 1910, following elections that year 15 labour representatives entered the House, but they believed that had the AFL backed them more fully then that number could have been bigger.

The psychological effect of labour's entry into politics, even in such a limited way, was still considerable; it became a new consideration for politicians to placate. It was not, however, an approach without shortcomings, in that workers' voting habits, like many other people's, are frequently not based on a rational analysis of candidates' actions in Congress. Also, as labour's vote was traditionally split between the major parties, it remained doubtful whether

Gompers could deliver the labour vote to any one party, something most politicians knew only too well. Labour's relative legislative isolation, in that labour had almost no firm allies among non-labour organisations, obviously reduced the chances of Gompers' new approach being fully successful, as did the strong anti-labour sentiments of most businessmen and many politicians.

Not all workers endorsed this new approach or even gave it a chance to work. The Structural Iron Workers Union led by the McNamara brothers embarked upon a bombing campaign to secure their ends. This campaign culminated in the **Los Angeles Times** explosion of 1 October 1910. The actions of the McNamaras and their subsequent trial and conviction cast all labour organisations in a poor light and so boded ill for the AFL. In the long run, however, the McNamara case had its positive side in that it caused many people to question a system that caused some workers to turn to violence. E.R.A. Seligman blamed the explosion upon "a type of mind that has begun in this country to despair of equality and economic opportunity, and is being driven into violence because of the conviction that no other kind of action is possible" (34). Slowly a sea change of sorts began to develop in the public's attitude to labour in spite of the best efforts of NAM and the stupidity of people like the McNamaras. This was helped in no small way by the exposures of journalistic "Muckrakers" who did much to gain public sympathy for working people. As the **Springfield Republican** stated, "capital must make up its mind to get along with labor. Such labor is here to stay, and the law is most likely to compel unionization of labor, rather than outlaw it" (35). With growing public hostility to trusts and their activities labour enjoyed a kind of renaissance. Many progressives, however, feared the rise of socialism and worried about disorders from below more than Gompers ever realised. The "memory of the social upheavals of the eighties and nineties hung like a pall over the minds of the articulate public" (36). Gompers was to eventually find that these progressives' attitude to unions was only slightly better than their attitudes to socialism, that they looked on labour as a poor cousin. By looking to these people for support rather than trying to act alone the AFL eventually discovered that it would only be treated with respect and given symbolic reforms when it accepted a subordinate role. Independent political action and labour radicalism were both viewed with horror by labour's new friends, and ultimately the AFL would only prosper whilst it accepted a junior and filial position in the progressive coalition.



## ENDNOTES

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## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **WILSON - AN INTRODUCTION**

Woodrow Wilson was one of the most educated men ever to govern from the White House. This chapter will look at his upbringing and early career as an academic; from this analysis a picture will emerge of a deeply flawed man. We shall see a man who could be coldly objective one moment and then highly prejudiced the next; a man who claimed he always fought for high principle, but who could break with close and trusted friends over minor points of honour. A curious character trait will emerge of a man who pushed hard for change, but who would dry up when the opposition hardened. This is important because the behaviour first seen at Princeton was reproduced later in Trenton and in the White House.

This chapter will close with Wilson's first tentative moves into practical politics, and in this section we will see how his wealthy backers advanced his candidacy as a conservative opponent to William Bryan's stranglehold on the Democratic party, but what they were soon frustrated when the politically ambitious Wilson "redefined" his conservative beliefs so as to be more attractive to progressive voters.

### **Wilson - Early Life And Opinions**

Thomas Woodrow Wilson was born on 28 December 1856 in Staunton, Virginia, the son of a Presbyterian minister. Wilson was extremely close to and strongly influenced, even dominated by his father, imbibing from him his deep and unquestioning religious faith, his admiration of the English literary classics and his dedication to intellectual and moral ideals. Wilson was fortunate in coming from a relatively comfortable and privileged background. He grew up knowing nothing of economic insecurity or poverty, he had almost no contact with the working class.

Until he entered Davidson College in 1873 his education had been largely informal, supervised mainly by his father. He had trouble coping with his studies and when his health failed he returned home. In 1875 he went to study at Princeton. He did not shine as a student, but he did win a reputation as an effective debater, he read widely on the lives of British statesmen, and began his lifelong interest in government and public affairs. An enthusiastic Anglophile, he noted that a number of Englishmen had entered politics from university, and hoped he could do the same. He was so confident that his intellectual gifts would make an active political career a real possibility that he had cards printed saying "T.W.Wilson, Senator for Virginia"(1).

Wilson liked to think of himself as a southern gentleman, and so tried to be always in accord with southern, especially Presbyterian, orthodoxy. He claimed that "a boy never gets over his boyhood, and can never change those subtle influences which have become a part of him"(3). His marked indifference to negroes was no doubt a product of his southern upbringing. Although it is true he never shared the extreme anti-negro sentiments of many of his contemporaries there is no doubt that he was a southerner on the race issue. Both Wilson and his wife were against social relations between the races. He even prevented negroes enrolling at Princeton while he was principal. When selecting personnel for his first presidential administration Wilson included many Southerners, some of whom demanded segregation in government departments. Whilst it is true he stood against some of the cruder demands of these white supremacists, he and most of his cabinet were in favour of segregation, both official and social. He was actually surprised by the anger the controversy aroused and maintained throughout that it was done in the interests of the negroes themselves.

Wilson's views on other races went well beyond his antipathy towards negroes. In his **History of the American People** he made highly derogatory remarks about the recent wave of immigrants entering America from southern and eastern Europe. He wrote to Californian Senator J. D. Phelan that "in the matter of Chinese and Japanese coolie immigration I stand for the national policy of exclusion ... the whole question is one of assimilation of diverse races. We cannot make a homogenous population out of people who do not blend with the caucasian race"(4).

He also had the contemporary disdain for career women, and always felt a woman's place was in the home. He spoke of his disgust for "unsexed, masculine women," (5) and had few female friends, most of his intimates being male. He disliked his time teaching at Bryn Mawr and found the women students irksome. Wilson's ideal woman was someone essentially feminine who was, as he told Ellen Axson "persuasive rather than coercive" (6). On the issue of female suffrage he told a reporter from the **Royal Gazette**, "women do not really want the franchise, and it would not be an unmixed blessing for the rest of the world if they had it .... They are almost too much protected. Not that I would have it otherwise" (7).

After a period as a post-graduate at Johns Hopkins, and spells teaching at Bryn Mawr and Wesleyan Wilson joined the staff at Princeton as professor of jurisprudence in 1890. This was his most prolific period for writing and research. Between 1893 and 1902 he published nine volumes and thirty five articles and made a score of public addresses mostly on politics and history. His doctoral thesis **Congressional Government** analysed the functioning of the federal government. Wilson felt that the present system scattered responsibility and made it impossible for the electorate to keep their representatives accountable. He found the House wanting as a legislative body, and wrote off the president as a nonentity without effective power. Throughout the book one can detect Wilson's bias against popular democracy in favour of government by intelligence and merit. He believed that the system as it stood was failing to produce real leaders, and so gave no scope for effective government. His remedy was a modified type of cabinet government where all cabinet members would be given seats in Congress, and so be made responsible for the passage of legislation. This solution is hardly surprising as Wilson was saturated with knowledge of English statesmen and politics; while his political roots were undoubtedly southern, his intellectual roots were English. At this time his model of political action was a somewhat romanticised version of British statecraft. However, in his lectures "he gives no glimpse of the economic background of the English ruling classes. It was never hinted in his lectures that the gentry, bankers and businessmen enacted laws to protect their own class" (8). His doctoral thesis was hailed by his academic companions as a landmark in the analysis of American politics, though, his ideas were neither new nor profound. Many articles had already covered the same ground; it is almost inconceivable that he had not seen them, yet he did not acknowledge having done so.

As an academic his writings were frequently marred by their shallow research, lack of originality, and deeply conservative attitude toward economic and social change. In **The Making of the Nation** he wrote of the "crude and ignorant minds of the members of the Farmer's Alliance"(9), and was savage in his criticism of Bryan and his "Cross of Gold" campaign. During these early academic years he belonged to the Grover Cleveland "sound money" wing of the Democratic party. He believed then and for long afterwards that trade unions were unAmerican and were not in the best interests of the individual worker, in that they curtailed the worker's right to sell his labour as he best saw fit. He long remained something of a Darwinian conservative. In **The State** he elaborated upon this gradualist theory of social change, "in politics nothing radically novel may be safely attempted"(10).

In 1902 Wilson was made principal of Princeton. He took office with high hopes of making the university the intellectual heartland of American academic life. E. Gittings Reid believed that "no university president ever had a stronger backing from his trustees than Wilson, and the majority of the faculty were his friends"(11). His early years as principal saw many successes. One of the innovations he suggested was the preceptorial system. Here instead of instructing students in a classroom-like manner through lectures and textbook reading, the university employed suitably qualified scholars to act as coaches and guides to the men's studies. When selecting personnel Wilson rather typically stated that "their qualities as gentlemen must take precedence over their qualities as scholars should there be a clash"(12).

A pre-requisite for the system was a thorough re-organisation of the university curriculum and departmental structure, which he undertook to carry out in 1903-1904. The adoption and inauguration of the preceptorial system and the re-organisation of the departmental structure and curriculum undoubtedly constitute Wilson's greatest triumphs at Princeton.

In 1907 he prepared a paper attacking the university eating clubs, a student messing system based on election to various clubs. Not all the students could find a place in such a club. Wilson felt that the system operated to separate the social from the intellectual interests of the student, as loyalty to one's club was often prized above loyalty to the university Wilson felt this was intolerable and wished to see the clubs replaced by a "quadrangle" messing system. On this issue a majority of the faculty and a large body of the under-graduates supported him, however,

a large bloc of the Eastern alumni were hostile, and their opposition led to the proposal being defeated, but not before much hard and bitter fighting. A plan to raise the intellectual life of Princeton at around \$3,000,000 was asking too much! Numerous accounts have since been written which show Wilson battling the forces of reaction and snobbery over this and the graduate college issue. Most were written *ex post facto*, for Wilson made an assiduous effort to subordinate the social issues to the intellectual during these quarrels. It is clear though that he was not reluctant in 1912 to make political capital out of these clashes. He bore his defeat over the quads with bad grace, and broke with some of his oldest and closest friends. Foolishly he allowed the whole affair to degenerate into a personal quarrel. His intransigence and refusal to compromise, or even to treat tolerantly those who opposed him, not only helped to cause the defeat, but also undermined his earlier successes.

The quad issue had barely subsided when Wilson found himself at the centre of another acrimonious struggle. Here he clashed with the dean of the university, A.F. West, an equally powerful and opinionated man. They fought over the location and control of a proposed graduate college. While Wilson was occupied with curriculum reform and the preceptorial system he had wanted all the endowments from the alumni. West accepted this and supported him putting aside his own plans in the process. When Wilson put forward his quad proposal in 1907 West felt betrayed over yet another delay to his graduate college plan, and the two men broke as friends. As West and his friends took the lead in opposing the quad plan, Wilson hoped he could weaken West's control over the graduate college and so get him to resign. The controversy was eventually resolved in May 1910 when I. C. Wyman died, leaving his entire estate valued at between \$2,000,000 and \$4,000,000 to the endowment of a graduate college along the West lines. This harmonised all differences of opinion and forced Wilson to admit total defeat. Wilson's active participation in Princeton affairs ended in June 1910 when he accepted the Democratic nomination for the New Jersey governorship. Obviously the trustees did not know if he would be successful, but Wilson hoped they would wait for his resignation until after the result of the election. The anti-Wilson trustees, however, who now controlled the board, decided to force him out. A delegation was sent to him telling him to resign or face a vote of no confidence that he could only lose. The following morning he published a short note of resignation. M.T. Pyne wrote W.C. Proctor, "according to the newspapers he forced his resignation on a reluctant board, although actually he was most reluctant to put it in and had to be told pretty positive that it had to be done" (13). Thus Wilson's time at Princeton ended

badly, his early triumphs soured by later defeats. These battles were unnecessary and were caused in large part by his inability to delegate responsibility or treat decently those who opposed him, a character trait that was to be displayed later when he began his political career.

### Wilson - The Birth Of The Politician

In 1901 while writing a volume for A.B.Hart's American Nation series Wilson first became acquainted with Colonel G.B.M.Harvey, a wealthy and influential newspaper owner. G.E.Mowry sees Harvey as a man more interested in protecting the position of the exceptional man in society than he ever was in bettering the lot of the masses. In own his book **The Tolerance of Power** Harvey concluded "the majority of men still lead only automatic lives and contribute to progress only force, which serves no better than an idle engine unless directed"(14). Many other conservatives agreed, some even felt that in the highly differentiated America of the early 1900s the levelling process had already gone too far and had incorporated "the theory of mediocrity which instinctively hates ability and invariably seeks undue advantage"(15). Harvey believed that Wilson shared his opinions and, after hearing his inaugural address at Princeton in 1902, he read all of his works. This led him to conclude that Wilson was potential presidential material; he was actually speaking to his assistant W.O.Inglis in such terms as early as 1902. He finally gave voice to these opinions at the Lotos Club dinner in honour of Wilson in February 1906. Here he made the startling proposal that Wilson should be nominated for president at a future date. Wilson was immensely flattered but no one, not even Wilson, seemed to take Harvey seriously. Undaunted Harvey pressed on and even set about enlisting support for Wilson from like-minded colleagues. On 10 March 1906 he ran an item on this very subject in his publication **Harper's Weekly**.

As a Democrat of conservative inclination Harvey had long opposed W.J.Bryan. Unfortunately for Harvey no one in the party had more influence than Bryan, but as he had led the party to defeat on two occasions many Democrats no longer saw him as a winning candidate. If a new candidate emerged Harvey knew that he would have to be economically sound enough to satisfy the east and yet still be able to arouse the enthusiasm of Democratic activists. In his quest to mount a challenge to Bryan, Harvey and his associates deliberately went outside the



ranks of professional politicians when lighting on Wilson. As a man of reputation, they knew he would be seen as an absolutely independent person. In a sense, the men to whom he would appeal for their vote would know nothing of him, on the other hand what they would know would be largely in his favour. He occupied a high and dignified position as a man of learning, a position which seemed to keep him above the sordidness of politics. Harvey was certain that "around his (Wilson's) banner would come all those forces which recognize that real progress comes from evolution, rather than revolution"(16). In his efforts to head off the progressives Harvey enlisted the support of a large group of political and economic conservatives, men like T.F.Ryan the utilities magnate and W.F.Laffan the publisher. Wall Street bankers, businessmen and conservative editors were all to be among Wilson's early supporters. So much so that in 1910 when Wilson was seeking to develop progressive credentials W.W.Bailey, the editor of the **Johnstown Democrat**, wrote "in common with many others I associated you with the reactionary element of the party"(17).

On Friday 15 March 1907 Harvey invited Wilson to a private dinner at Delmonico's in New York. Here Wilson met Laffan and Ryan, and as W.O.Inglis says "a self-constituted committee of investigation and selection, acting in behalf of a Conservative Democracy as against the Bryanized variety," met to look Wilson over "to see if he came up to specifications"(18). At the request of his dinner companions Wilson put together a paper called "Credo". This document provides a succinct summary of his political and economic views in this period. In it Wilson said

The object of constitutional government is the liberty of the individual. There is no such thing as corporate liberty or corporate morality: only the individual can be moral and free. We need statutes not to regulate the business of the country, but to single out the individual amidst the intricacies of modern industrial organisation, and to fix upon men the responsibility for particular transactions. Great trusts are necessary because they are the most convenient and efficient instrumentalities of modern business .... Government should not undertake to regulate and supervise business.

Wilson commented on labour thus

the constitution guarantees to every man the right to sell his labour to whom he pleases for such price as he is willing to accept. The men who abridge or abrogate this right have neither the ideas nor the sentiments needed for the maintenance or the enjoyment of liberty(19).

Wilson's words must have satisfied his dinner companions for Ryan later contributed generously to his first campaign, and Laffan's **New York Sun** supported Wilson up until Laffan died. Thus Wilson the avowed conservative Democrat was taken under the wing of the east coast capitalist section of the party, largely because it liked his pro-capital, anti-labour views. Here was a man they could identify with, and use.

From this time onwards Wilson was encouraged to speak out on political issues. In December 1907 he addressed the Southern Society of New York, during which he emphasized the necessity for political idealism as a motivating force in American regeneration, and also said "governments should supply an equilibrium not a disturbing force"(20), showing that his deep rooted sense of historical conservatism was still predominant. He had never been impressed by the progressives and their demands, his conservatism tended to make him think that reform should always be geared towards maintaining the **status quo**. In 1896 Wilson had been openly contemptuous of Bryan and the Populists, however, once he began to contemplate the possibility of a political career he began to re-examine many of his own beliefs. By 1907 he was beginning to admit that much of Bryan's diagnosis was essentially correct, but he still felt that Bryan was "a man with a power of leadership but with no mental rudder"(21).

In November 1904 Laffan's **New York Sun** quoted Wilson as saying "the country needs and will tolerate no party of discontent or radical experiment, but it does need and will follow a party of conservative reform acting in the spirit of law and ancient institutions" (22). Three years later he was still saying "the problems that face contemporary America cannot be solved by radical action. Reform must come, but Americans must see to it that the process of reform is moderate and self-possessed by putting its prosecution in the hands of those who are free from the follies of establishing a panic and radical experiment"(23). This was the doctrine of an avowed conservative, one who would be at ease in the company of men like Harvey and Ryan.

He denounced the regulatory passion of Roosevelt, he inveighed against regulation in business and industry by commission, he believed that a temperate and honest pursuit of private good was a public blessing. During the same speech he had gone on to say "the process of reform must be guided by those who understand the danger of drastic and radical change, who know the folly of rash experiments .... we do not speak exclusively of the capitalist classes. There is another as formidable an enemy to equality and freedom of opportunity, and that is the class formed by the labor organizations and leaders of the country - a class representing a small minority of the laboring men of the country, quite as monopolistic in spirit as the capitalists and quite as apt to corrupt and ruin other industries by their monopolies. If we are to restore the purity of our law and the freedom of our life we must see to it that no class whatever is given artificial privilege or opportunity"(23).

He went much further than this in June 1909 when giving his baccalaureate address to the graduating class at Princeton:

You know the usual standard of the employe is our day. It is to give as little as he may for his wages. Labor is standardized by the trade unions, and this is the standard to which it is made to conform. No one is suffered to do more than the average workman can do: in some trades and handicrafts no one is suffered to do more than the least skilful of his followers can do within the hours allotted to a day's labor, and no one may work out of hours at all or volunteer anything beyond the minimum. I need not point out how economically disastrous such a regulation of labor is. It is so unprofitable to the employer that in some trades it will presently not be worth his while to attempt anything at all. He had better stop altogether. America is rapidly becoming unprofitable under its present regulation (24).

The speech was reported in the **New York Times**,

**Woodrow Wilson Hits Labor Unions. Says They Gave The Least Possible For Wages (25).**

The speech and accompanying newspaper coverage provoked a storm of protest from unionists throughout the country who bombarded Wilson with letters. When attempting to explain his

position he was forced to admit he had obtained all his information from “those who employ labor on a great scale” (26). He had little to say by way of reply to the many people who attacked him for his ignorance of working conditions and his unsympathetic attitudes.

### **Wilson - The Gubernatorial Campaign In New Jersey 1910**

The impending defeat of the Republicans in New Jersey in 1910 was apparent to Harvey long before the actual date, and this made him think that the time was right for actively launching Wilson’s political career. Harvey was certain that the governorship would be a useful place for Wilson to cut his political teeth whilst also serving as a springboard for a presidential bid in 1912. There is no evidence, in his speeches or letters, that Wilson ever concerned himself with New Jersey politics on any occasion before this date, not that this bothered Harvey.

The Republicans had been in control of the New Jersey legislature since 1893. Big business was securely in the saddle and held the reins of Republican power. R.E. Noble alleged that “probably no part of the Union offered more impregnable defenses to the onslaughts of progressivism than New Jersey” (27). Practically all the great holding companies secured their charters under her laws, earning the state the dubious title “mother of trusts” (28). Before the advent of Wilson progressivism in the state was a Republican endeavour, these “New Ideas” men as the Republican progressives were called prepared the way for many of the reforms Wilson was later praised for passing.

The Democratic party in New Jersey was controlled by three men. The most powerful figure was James Smith, who was president of the Federal Trust Company of Newark, head of several manufacturing companies and the owner of some morning and evening newspapers. He was a natural politician and as such was leader of Irish-American and Catholic affairs in much of the state. Smith was a longstanding friend of Harvey, whose career Harvey had helped on many occasions. Smith’s help on its own would not be enough, however, and so the assistance of the two other Democratic bosses would be needed. One was James Nugent, but as he was Smith’s nephew and one of his financial underlings, Harvey knew he could be trusted to follow

the Smith line. As Nugent was chairman of the state Democratic Committee this greatly strengthened the Smith-Nugent stranglehold on New Jersey. The third party boss, Robert Davis, was the county collector of taxes and held the reins of power in the Jersey City area. He was a longstanding enemy of Smith, but his help would be essential if Harvey was to have Wilson elected governor. Harvey was confident he could pressurize all three into co-operating, and he was to be proved correct. While Harvey was arranging all of this, Wilson made it clear that he would do nothing to secure the nomination, but would accept it if it came to him unsolicited. Harvey was so sure of his hold over the state bosses that he felt he could even arrange that. Davis certainly agreed for he was heard to say "How the hell do I know whether he will make a good governor. He will make a good candidate and that is the only thing that interests me"(29). Smith was also willing to accept Harvey's plan, but only after Wilson promised that if he was elected governor he would co-operate with the party machine and not attempt to set up an organisation of his own.

By June 1910 Harvey had convinced Smith that Wilson was the ideal candidate for the Democratic presidential nomination in 1912. This prompted Smith to say "we have the opportunity of electing the next president of the United States by nominating and electing Woodrow Wilson as governor of New Jersey"(30). On 15 July 1910 Wilson wrote to the **Trenton True American** and the **Newark Evening News** to announce his willingness to accept the gubernatorial nomination. Most of the Democratic and many of the Republican newspapers greeted this news with enthusiasm. Wilson struck many journalists as being a fascinating and unique character, which resulted in his getting local and national press coverage not given to other candidates.

While the Democratic bosses closed ranks around Wilson, the machine found that many Democrats were not prepared to accept him. There was no tidal wave of popular support for Wilson entering politics. In fact many progressives took the attempts of the machine to foist him upon the party as a blow to their efforts against bossism. The fact that the bosses endorsed him was taken as "a sign of your (Wilson's) willingness to allow the use of your name as a club by men whom every good Democrat feels to have been the bane of the party and whose leadership has made the state hopelessly Republican"(31). Others agreed, the **Hudson Observer** asserted "that Dr. Wilson was induced to enter the race by a combination of the very elements which the progressives were fighting". It went on to call him the "catpaw of the

bosses''(32). Ten days earlier W.R.Hearst's **Chicago Record-Herald** had perceptively declared "Woodrow Wilson will be the Democratic candidate for president in 1912 if a combination of Wall Street and political interests can make him so''(33).

Wilson's opponents manoeuvred skilfully and had James Kerney of the **Trenton Evening News** lead the assault upon him. Following Harvey's advice Wilson had refused to make any statements on his views. This was used as a powerful weapon against him as he wished to become the gubernatorial candidate only if a "decided majority of thoughtful Democrats''(34) wanted him, yet he would not elaborate upon his beliefs! This led Kerney to say "the thoughtful Democrats of the state are asked to pass upon the candidacy of a man who is unwilling to let them know his views. He has never taken an active part in New Jersey affairs, never had the slightest experience of public life and is an absolute stranger to the great body of voters .... In effect he says take me on the endorsement of Morgan, Harvey and Lindbergh whose corporate connections you know. He does not even refer to his earlier expressions on working men to earn their wages, or his decidedly undemocratic view that the people are incompetent to select their servants''(35).

Even with coverage like this Wilson still had many advantages over his opponents: the backing of all the New Jersey bosses, a basically friendly press, and the fact that the progressives were badly organised and split between rival candidates. Thus on 14 September 1910 at the state convention Wilson won the nomination on the first ballot. Interestingly, he was introduced to his audience as "the candidate for the governorship, AND THE NEXT PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES''(36). His acceptance speech was a great success and a revelation in that he asserted "I did not seek this nomination, it came to me completely unsolicited. With the consequence that I shall enter upon the duties of the office of governor if elected with absolutely no pledge of any kind to prevent me from serving the people''(37). Startling words coming from a man whose nomination and subsequent election were boss engineered and supported. To have any real chance of success Wilson knew he would still need the votes of many Republicans and independents. Their support was by no means certain as his Republican opponent, V.M.Lewis, occupied a similar position to himself, being a candidate of a boss controlled party who appeared to be more progressive than his party leaders.

Wilson's first speeches in the campaign were not a success, he did not mention any state issue, merely laying before his audiences a revamped edition of the speeches on national affairs he had been giving for five years. It soon became apparent that if he was to have any chance of success he would have to break with his conservative past and embrace progressivism - a break evidently caused as much by political expediency as any other factor. He did not strike out on this new course without the prompting and tutoring of people like H.E. Alexander, the editor of the **Trenton True American**, who was among many advising him, helping in the preparation of speeches and instructing him on which issues to raise. Throughout the first three weeks of October Wilson's speeches developed a markedly more radical tone, so much so that by 11 October he was declaring with apparent sincerity "I am and always have been an insurgent"(38).

His Republican opponents counter-attacked by publishing many pamphlets alleging that he was an enemy of organised labour. It was here that they achieved their greatest success. Wilson's conservative pro-business, anti-union views were circulated widely and generated a reaction among workingmen that offered a serious threat to the Democrats. The backlash began in Trenton when the Central Labor Union adopted a resolution that the workingmen of the area were "unalterably opposed to the nomination of Woodrow Wilson for the Governorship of New Jersey"(39). Matters worsened when the State Federation of Labor at their Newark Convention overwhelmingly endorsed the following resolution:

Whereas, the financial interests of Wall Street, New York, are endeavouring to have Woodrow Wilson, President of Princeton University, nominated as a candidate for the Governor of the State of New Jersey, and whereas, in his baccalaureate address to the students of Princeton University in 1909 Woodrow Wilson again strongly expressed his antagonism to organized labor: therefore be it resolved, by the New Jersey State Federation of Labor in Convention assembled this 15 August 1910, that this Federation be placed on record as opposing the nomination of said Woodrow Wilson as a candidate for Governor, that it urges every trade unionist and wage earner that, should the Wall Street financial interests succeed in having Woodrow Wilson nominated to act as a tool or agent of said Wall Street interests if he should be elected, that every trade unionist and wage earner in the State of New Jersey do their best to defeat him

and to teach the financial interests of Wall Street, New York, that the voters and trade unionists of the State of New Jersey are capable of selecting their own Governor. (40)

This threw the Wilson camp into disarray. He was urged by his advisors to effect a counter move at the earliest opportunity. A chance presented itself when E.R. Williamson, the editor of the **American Labor Standard**, wrote to Wilson asking him to clarify his position on views. Wilson seized the chance and wrote him a public letter in which he said:

The gross misrepresentations of my views with regard to organized labor which some newspapers have printed have given me no concern .... I was distressed that the New Jersey Federation of Labor should have allowed itself to be imposed upon - not because its members are likely to remain deceived in this matter, but for the opposite reason .... I have always been a friend of organized labor. It is in my opinion, not only perfectly legitimate, but absolutely necessary that labor should organize if it is to secure justice from organized capital, and everything that it does to improve the condition of workingmen, to obtain legislation that will impose full legal responsibility upon the employer for his treatment of his employes and for their protection against accident, to secure just and adequate wages, and to put just limits upon the working day and upon all the exactions of those who employ labor, ought to have the hearty support of the fairminded and public spirited man. For there is a sense in which the condition of labor is the condition of the nation itself .... I have criticized some of the things organized labor has occasionally done, but I have criticized them as a friend and because I thought them harmful to the laborers themselves and harmful to the country. I know of no other standard by which to judge these things .... The laboring men cannot benefit themselves by injuring the industries of the country. Many thoughtful laboring men are themselves critical. I am much more afraid that the great corporations, combinations and trusts will do the country harm than that the labor organizations will do harm (41).



Here Wilson repudiated virtually everything he had ever said about unions. Many editors were willing to accept his argument that while he had attacked unions in the past it was only ever done in a spirit of friendship. The **Perth Amboy Evening News** declared, "with his letter setting forth his position on organized labor Woodrow Wilson stands forth stronger than ever as a candidate (42). Many Republican journals agreed. Kerney in the **Trenton Evening News** remained unconvinced saying that to state that Wilson was "shifting his position towards the unions was ludicrous to say the least" (43). In the **Jersey Journal** Henry F. Hilfers, secretary of the State Federation of Labor asserted that Wilson's rapid change of heart was linked solely to his desire to be governor.

Wilson's letter to Williamson prompted many workingmen to write to him asking him to explain the differences between the things he had said to Williamson and his earlier addresses. Sam Gompers contacted him on 20 October asking for a copy of his 1909 baccalaureate address and additional comments on his labour planks. D.L. MacKay, a New Jersey union official and W. Blackburn, the secretary of the Machinist local 87 West Jersey Lodge wrote numerous letters during October asking Wilson to explain the contradictions between his various statements. This led Wilson to write to MacKay, "there is absolutely no contradiction between the two sets of remarks you have seen quoted from me regarding the organization of labor. I believe that the organization of labor is absolutely necessary in the face of organized capital, and that most of the legitimate advantages which the laboring man has won in recent years in the respect of wages and many other matters have been won through the instrumentality of labor organizations. They have been legitimate and useful. At the same time I have once and again criticized the use they have made of their organization" (44). His answers satisfied neither MacKay nor Blackburn.

His mounting problems with labour led Wilson to seek out audiences of workers and to return constantly to labour issues. In the closing weeks of October he spoke almost exclusively on labour topics before audiences at Philipsburg, Newton, Camden, Salem, New Brunswick, Elizabeth, Bayonne and in both Bergen and Mercer counties. Although each speech was subtly different in every case he endeavoured to make clear that he felt his previous words on unions had been deliberately misrepresented by his opponents in order to deceive, and that he had only ever voiced them in the first place out of a solicitude on his part for the interests of workers themselves. Wilson's efforts to win the votes of workers by asserting that he had not really

meant what he had said previously may well have mollified many individual labourers; the officers of the State Federation of Labor, however, remained unconvinced and refused to withdraw their resolution condemning him.

While labour as an organisation remained antagonistic Wilson was successful in winning the support of enough Democrats, Republicans and independents to win the election. He won by a plurality of 49,056 and carried into office alongside him a Democratic assembly. Wilson had a total of 233,933 votes, Lewis only managed 185,573. This was a gratifying victory for Wilson as Taft had carried the state for the Republicans in 1908 with a majority of 80,000. But the night of 8 November 1910 was a good one for the Democrats nationally. The House of Representative became Democrat controlled for the first time since 1892, and Democratic governors were elected in the previously Republican states of New York, Massachusetts, Connecticut, Ohio, Indiana, North Dakota and Colorado. Thus Wilson's boss engineered victory in New Jersey was helped in no small way by the resurgence in the Democrats' fortunes nationally.

## ENDNOTES

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- 5 Link, Road, p. 322.
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- 8 F.C.Howe on Wilson quoted in Link, Road, p. 24.
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- 28 Link, Road, p. 134.
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- 30 J.Smith to C.H.Gallaghan quoted in Link, Road, p. 144.
- 31 E.A.Stevens to Wilson, 29 December 1907, PWW 17, p. 572.
- 32 Hudson Observer, 18 July 1910, PWW 21, p. 18.
- 33 Chicago Record-Herald, 8 July 1910, PWW 21, p. 2.
- 34 Wilson to Trenton True American, 15 July 1910, PWW 21, p. 15.
- 35 Trenton Evening News, 5 August 1910, PWW 21, p. 41.
- 36 Link, Road, p. 166.
- 37 Wilson Address, 15 September 1910, PWW 21, p. 95-7.
- 38 Wilson Address, 11 October 1910, PWW 21, p. 298.
- 39 Trenton Evening News, 30 July 1910, PWW 21, p. 23.
- 40 Trenton Evening News, 15 August 1910, PWW 21, p. 47.
- 41 Wilson to E.R.Williamson, 23 August 1910, PWW 21, p. 60.
- 42 Perth Amboy Evening News, 5 September 1910, PWW 21, p. 85.
- 43 Trenton Evening News, 3 September 1910, PWW 21, p. 79.
- 44 Wilson to D.L.MacKay, 11 October 1910, PWW 21, p. 298.

## CHAPTER THREE

### GOVERNOR OF NEW JERSEY.

Wilson was praised by his contemporaries as a great progressive governor, and success in New Jersey considerably helped in his fight for the presidency. This chapter, however, will attempt to show a different side to his governorship. We will see that the achievements of the New Jersey legislature were in actual fact quite commonplace, and merely brought the state into line with developments elsewhere. We shall see how Wilson curtailed the advances his legislators could have made by limiting his official programme to four main measures, and that these bills when passed into law owed as much to the legislators' efforts themselves as they did to Wilson. But the State Federation of Labor fared well under Wilson and got much needed help with the passing of the state's Employer's Liability - Workingmen's Compensation Act, and as a result their previously poor impression of him was amended. Whilst the 1911 session was hailed as a great success we shall see that the 1912 session was not. This was because Wilson simply spent too much time chasing the Democratic presidential nomination, and when he was in Trenton he was unwilling and unable to work with the Republican assemblymen who then controlled the legislature.

#### The Legislative Session 1911

Wilson was sworn in as the forty third governor of New Jersey on 17 January 1911. When he was elected both he and his friends knew that he had been put into training for the presidency. The nomination lay two years away, so he had only that amount of time in which to make a reputation for himself and to develop a national machine. Money, favour and habit had bought Wilson his nomination and victory. Thus the new governor entered office pledged to serve two masters: the bosses who had secured his victory and now expected some say in the new administration, and the progressives among the electorate who expected him to redeem the party pledges. His plight was eased in that he could draw support from a basically friendly legislature. There was a Democratic majority in a joint session; although the Democrats had an overwhelming majority in the assembly, the Republicans had a slight majority in the senate. The legislature of 1911 was not unlike most of the other state legislatures of the period as far as the quality of its members was concerned. The average assemblyman, irrespective of party,

could boast little real political ability. Most were rather mediocre transients on their road to other government offices. Wilson spoke of them thus, ‘‘they are not at all to my taste. I cannot help feeling a bit vulgar after them .... they do not leave me pleased with myself. I feel debased to the level of the men who I feel obliged to snub’’(1).

During and immediately after the election Wilson gave little thought to his relationship with the Smith machine. The state committees, the county committees, the ward organisations in the cities, all the organs of the New Jersey party were controlled by Smith and his associates. Prior to his nomination Wilson had agreed not to attack or undermine the party machine (2). Shortly after the election, however, Smith informed Wilson that he had decided to ignore a recent vote which endorsed J. E. Martine as the Democrats’ choice as the next state senator, and was hoping to return to the Senate himself. Wilson was anxious to dissuade him as such an action would make him look like a tool of Smith. He was keen to avoid a break with Smith, but he could not persuade him to withdraw or accept a compromise candidate. Kerney noted that ‘‘to our suggestion that the Democrats had already definitely decided on Martine he gave little weight’’(3). While Wilson was anxious to quietly resolve things without any great upheaval, all the state’s leading progressive papers backed Martine. ‘If Martine should be robbed of his rights by the Democratic machine, the people will realize that they have been betrayed’’(4).

Judge J.W. Westcott was among many progressives who wrote to Wilson asserting that, ‘‘if Smith is chosen, these results are certain: 1 His election will prove a bargain and sale, the office going to the highest bidder. 2 Dr. Wilson is controlled by the same interests and methods that control Smith. 3 Dr. Wilson, so far as his usefulness in American regeneration is concerned, would be a negative quality. 4 The Democratic party in New Jersey would be out of power at the next election’’(5). Such criticism prompted Wilson to act. He wrote to Colonel Harvey hoping he would make Smith withdraw, but he could not do so. Thus Wilson came to realise that his hopes of seizing the leadership of the progressive forces nationally could be destroyed if he failed to support the progressives in New Jersey on this issue. Also as the progressives held the balance of power in the legislature their support was essential to the implementation of his state programme. He knew that if he did not lead the anti-Smith forces now he would never receive their support later. On 25 January 1911 Wilson succeeded in having Martine elected as the Senator for New Jersey by 47 votes to 3. It was fortunate for Wilson that this

controversy occurred at the beginning of his political career, for it threw him out to the foremost waves of progressivism in the country. The defeat of Smith also made the average state assemblyman more willing to accept and follow the new governor. Without victory in this early clash it is arguable that Wilson would have experienced tremendous problems in enacting any part of his programme in 1911. His victory over Smith had its adverse side, however, in that it caused his original backer Harvey to have doubts about the wisdom of his scheme to advance Wilson as a conservative Democratic candidate for the presidency. His trouncing of Smith also made many veteran Democratic bosses loath to endorse him as a candidate.

Wilson was also fortunate that the Martine battle occurred early in his governorship for it left him free in the last weeks of December 1910 and early January 1911 to draw up a programme for the new assembly. It also meant that when the assembly convened on 10 January 1911 he soon became the most powerful figure there. To help in the drafting of a programme Wilson called a conference at his Princeton home. This group included academics from his teaching days, representatives from both parties and George Record, the state's leading progressive Republican. He arrived at Wilson's door armed with a wealth of material. To him Wilson assigned the task of writing direct primary and corrupt practices bills. Wilson asked other members present to prepare the remaining measures, these the **Trenton Evening News** reported "embody platform pledges favoring the enactment of public utilities, corrupt practices and employer's liability laws, as well as an election law"(6). On the subject of further legislation Wilson declared "I am not saying whether they have my support or opposition until they reach my hands"(6). He was astute enough to realise that the majority of laws, both public and private, enacted by a state legislature in any single session were of little real interest to the public. He knew that his own assemblymen would also demand their share of petty legislation, and so he and his advisors resolved from the outset to insist upon only four leading reform measures.

The state Democratic party had pledged Wilson as governor to "The enactment of an employer's liability act which will satisfy the just demands of labor and secure safety and efficient sanitation in all manufacturing processes and employment," and "The enactment of a law establishing eight hours as the limit of the working day in all public works"(7). Wilson was careful to endorse these pledges in the many speeches he made to audiences of

workingmen. In his inaugural address on 17 January 1911 Wilson outlined the scope of his programme as far as labour matters were concerned:

No wise man will say that he sees the whole problem of reform lying plain before him or knows how to frame the entire body of law that will be necessary to square with the general interest.... in the first place, it is plain that our laws with regard to the relations of employer and employe are in many respects wholly antiquated and impossible. The employer is now generally a corporation or huge company, the employe is one of hundreds or of thousands brought together, not by individual masters whom they know and with whom they have personal relations, but by agents of one sort or another .... New rules must be devised with regard to their obligations to their employers and their responsibilities to one another. New rules must be devised for their protection, for their compensation when injured, for their support when disabled .... We must have a workingman's compensation act, which will give him rights without suit, directly, and without conflict, by automatic operation of law. This is the first adjustment needed, because it affects the rights, the happiness, the lives and fortunes of the largest number, and because it is the adjustment for which justice cries loudest (8).

He thus placed an employer's liability - workingman's compensation bill at the front of his legislative programme. In closing his speech he conceded "this is a big program, but it is a perfectly consistent program, and it is a perfectly feasible programme, and upon whose details it ought to be perfectly possible to agree even within the limits of a single legislative session"(8). Wilson threw his cap into the ring in the fight to enact the programme, pitting his reputation - to rise or to fall - upon it. As it was the programme the progressive of both parties had been trying to enact for over ten years its passage now, when many of them were actually sitting in the assembly, was surely not asking for too much?

On 4 February 1911 a steering committee was formed which included J.P. Tumulty - Wilson's private secretary, J.J. Treacey, Record and assemblymen Fielder, Silzer, Osborne and Gebhardt. Meeting at Wilson's home they decided who would sponsor which bills. Wilson had assemblyman Geran take control of the primary and election reform measure. It was



introduced into the lower house on 6 February 1911. It passed both houses and their respective committees by a majority of 34 to 25 on 6 March 1911. Whilst its passage was a victory for the forces of liberalism, the bill was so shabbily constructed, and so full of minor errors, that it was "an absolutely unworkable document"(9). Record drafted the corrupt practices bill borrowing heavily from U'Ren's Oregon reforms, and by 20 April 1911 this bill had also passed into law. It was speedily followed by a bill designed to effectively regulate the rates and activities of public utilities. The bill encountered few real obstacles in either house. Passing into law on the final day of the session it was one of the most through going public utilities statutes in the country at that time.

The last of the four major measures was the workingman's compensation bill. Wilson outlined his reasons for backing it thus,

New Jersey is belated beyond most all of the states in establishing a just relationship of liability between the employer and the employee. We have permitted to exist in this state until the present day common law defenses against liability which belong to an absolutely different state of society. These common law defenses ... ought to have gone with chain armor. Not in order to leave the employer defenseless, but in order to leave an equitable arrangement, by which there should be set an automatic insurance of workingmen against risk, an insurance that must be borne by the employer. What insurance company will now for reasonable rates insure an employer against the absolutely incalculable risks of a suit of law? You have to go before a jury. The sympathy of the jury may give excessive damages if the case is pitiable. No one can calculate the result of a suit. You cannot establish a rate against which there is no basis of calculation, but if you will establish a definite schedule of liabilities and have that schedule extend to the insurance company, than you can reinsure yourself in the insurance company at a definite, fixed calculable rate, and you are not going to pay, for the whole community is going to pay for it (10).

In spite of the continued agitation of the New Ideas reformers as late as 1908 New Jersey was still "shamed by having the most ancient and unjust of any employer's liability laws in the country"(11). Employer - employee relations in New Jersey were still regulated solely on the

principles of the common law, and an injured employee often found it near impossible to get damages because of the operation of the rules of "assumption of risk," "contributory negligence" and "fellow servant negligence." The burden in industrial accidents, therefore, fell almost entirely upon the injured employee, his family, or private charity. The AFL was in favour of compensation, but their preferred solution was to improve the worker's chance of success through the courts. While wanting greater employer liability in the case of injury, the AFL did not want to see laws passed which set specific rates for specific injuries; however, by 1907, 26 states had just such a law. The AFL was not happy with this development for they believed that attacking compensation settlements through the courts could result in greater labour gains, whereas compensation laws merely pensioned off injured workers on a fixed income.

In 1909 agitation by New Jersey progressives and the State Federation of Labor had forced the Republican party, then controlling the legislature, to modify the operation of the common law principles. The new statute was so badly drawn that it satisfied the demands of no one. The struggle continued and in 1910 the Republican leaders were forced to concede the appointment of a commission of inquiry under Senator Edge to investigate the problem for Governor Fort. Shortly after his inauguration Wilson conferred with Edge on the question of an employer's liability law that would meet the demands of organised labour. Although his commission was mainly Republican Edge assured Wilson that his members would be cooperative. On 16 January 1911 Edge introduced an employer's liability bill into the upper house. When it was sent to the assembly, however, it encountered the opposition of assemblyman Ford, who was the president of the State Federation of Labor and chairman of the committee on labor and industries. Ford was recognized as the leading spokesman for organised labour in New Jersey. Both parties had agreed to support the principle of workingmen's compensation during the 1910 election, so the controversy over the 1911 legislation was a straight fight over the nature and extent of any such measure. Edge's bill had grown directly out of his commission on liability. Wilson gave Edge the go-ahead on his bill shortly after refusing to introduce a similar bill submitted to him by Record. Edge's bill made its provisions elective in an effort to prevent it being declared unconstitutional at a later date. It also contained a clause saying that if the parties concerned did not contract out of its operation within a given period then its conditions would take effect automatically. The bill approved specific sums for specific injuries, this ran contrary to the wishes of organised labour and so became a point of contention when it entered the assembly. When the bill first came to the vote

in the Senate on 14 March 1911, Senator Gebhardt speaking for Wilson opposed the single measure that specified set sums for particular injuries as it was known that the State Federation objected to this.

Assemblyman Ford countered Edge by introducing two similar bills on 16 January 1911 into the lower houses, one on employer's liability, the other on workingmen's compensation. Assemblyman A. B. Walsh of Mercer County also proposed a measure of his own, which called for a definite schedule of compensation for specific injuries. Ford insisted that his measures should take precedence over Edge's bill, largely because they provided for greater compensation. By forcefully advancing his own bills and using his powers in the assembly he succeeded in keeping Edge's bill bottled up in committee for two weeks when it came down from the Senate in March 1911, without actually reporting it to the lower house. In a bid to end this embarrassing situation Wilson had to take decisive action. Thus in late March he decided to openly support Edge over Ford, reasoning that Edge's more cautious bill had the greater chance of passing the legislature successfully before the session ended in April. He was fearful that the current disagreement between the two houses would result in no liability legislation passing at all. Wilson was certain that Ford's bill, being broader in scope and more expensive, would not pass the more conservative, Republican - dominated Senate. He called Ford in, hoping that he could persuade him to accept the Edge measure. "Don't you think it would be the part of wisdom to accept the Edge bill and make sure of getting something?" (12) Wilson asked of Ford. Clearly Wilson impressed Ford as, after discussions with the State Federation, he backed the Edge bill as a compromise measure. On 3 April 1911 the assembly unanimously approved the state's first workingmen's compensation act. The following day Wilson added his signature. He praised Ford for cooperating, "it is said about Mr Ford that his interests are too much specialized and centred, that he does not really think of any legislation except that which is in the interest of the laboring man. He is interested in more things. I cannot say I criticize him for being interested in the matter .... Ford and his associates in the great laboring organizations of the State had independent preferences with regard to the provisions of the Employer's Liability and Workingman's Compensation Act, they cooperated in the passage of the act .... They were not working, so far as I discovered, for any private or partisan advantage" (13).

The Edge bill was in three parts like the 1909 act it superseded. Section one specifically abolished the two remaining grounds which exempted employers from liability: assumption of risk and fellow servant negligence. Once an employer and his employees had agreed to be bound by the act the employer was compelled to pay compensation whether there was negligence or not. It was assumed that the parties concerned had agreed to this unless they specifically stated that they would not be bound by its provisions. One exception was if the injury was clearly self-inflicted due to intoxication. Section two caused more controversy, dealing as it did with the method of compensation. It laid down a definite schedule of payments to be made in the case of injury or death, and provided that during the first two weeks after injury the employer should furnish reasonable medical care to the injured worker. In the case of death there was a sliding scale of payments linked to such things as the deceased worker's dependents and job description. Workers had to agree to surrender their right to seek compensation elsewhere, such as from a jury trial. They could go to court only if the amount of compensation was disputed. The final section defined wilful negligence on the part of the employee, in which case the act need not apply, and also set forth the general provisions of the law. While approving this act, the legislature simultaneously approved two more Edge bills. One expanded the coverage of the new law to people employed before the act came into force. The other established an employer's liability commission to investigate and report on injuries.

In 1910 the New York state legislature had passed a workingman's compensation act similar to the Edge bill. On 24 March 1911 the State Court of Appeal declared the New York measure unconstitutional on the grounds that its compulsory features violated both state and federal provisions. The Newark District Telegraph Company set about testing the New Jersey legislation in October 1911 declaring that this measure was also unconstitutional. On 26 February 1913 the State Supreme Court upheld the act, denying the company's claim that it violated the Fourteen Amendment. This was by no means the only problem with the act as Wilson pointed out that "a great many indemnity companies which have sought to discharge the whole business by raising their rates from 40% to 100%, when the employers try to do what they must do - insure themselves against the risk - I am not by any means sure that my judgement goes to the length of a State system of insurance, but these gentlemen can oblige us to establish one"(14). All the parties concerned reached a compromise settlement thus making state action unnecessary.

The State Federation of Labor understood perfectly the limitations inherent in the governor's office and powers, and so were pleased with what had been accomplished. The new act went as far as mainstream AFL members wished government intervention in their affairs to go. The fixed rate of compensation for specific injuries was not to their taste, nor was the fact that the worker was obliged to surrender his right to a jury trial. Most still agreed, however, that the concessions granted were satisfactory as the act improved upon the existing situation and in the circumstances was the best they could expect.

The progressive leaders in the state legislature had a reform programme of their own, that in many respects went far beyond the bounds of Wilson's four - cornered package, and so they worked hard for its passage. During the 1912 presidential campaign Wilson received the credit for all the measures enacted during his term, those he had actually worked for, and those passed with nothing more than his passive support. Certainly his bruising of the Smith machine made things a lot easier for these progressive legislators, and even passive support is better than nothing; but he was in no real sense the driving force behind most of the measures adopted during the 1911 session. A number of less spectacular laws completed the general reform programme and included laws that required stringent factory inspection, and a regulation governing the hours and type of labour that women and children could undertake. Clearly this was necessary for the **Trenton True American** declared, "a law of this kind is of more importance than laws regulating corporations since they directly affect 98% of the people - the working people, while the other laws regulating corporations only effect 2% of the capitalists"(15). Wilson supported the bill, but only passively, his energies at this time being directed towards the fight for the Democratic presidential nomination.

In a letter to Mrs M.A.Hulbert, Wilson summed up the achievements of the 1911 session, "the legislature adjourned yesterday morning at three o'clock with its work done. I got absolutely everything I strove for - and more besides: all four of the great acts that I had set my heart on (the primaries and election law, the corrupt practices act, as stringent as the English, the workingman's compensation act, and the act giving a public commission control over the railroads, the trolley lines, the water companies, and the gas and electric light and power companies), and besides them I got certain fundamental school reforms and an act enabling any city in the State to adopt the commission form of government, which simplifies the electoral process and concentrates responsibility. Everyone, the papers included, are saying

that none of it could have been done, if it had not been for my influence and tact and hold upon the people .... I wrote the platform, I had the measures formulated in my mind, I kept the pressure of opinion constantly on the legislature, and the programme was carried out to the last detail''(16). Whilst it was perfectly reasonable for Wilson to feel proud of the legislature's achievements, it was grossly unfair of him to seize the lion's share of the credit. Men had been battling in New Jersey for over ten years for these self-same measures; and it was these men who had helped in writing the bills, it was they who had introduced them into their respective chambers, and who had helped in the marshalling of forces when it came to voting. This is not to steal Wilson's thunder, but merely to put his own role into its proper perspective. He redressed the balance marginally when he told Hulbert, 'I came to office in the fullness of time, when opinion was ripe in all these matters, when both parties were committed to these reforms, and by merely standing fast, and by never losing sight of the business for an hour, but keeping up all sorts of (legitimate) pressure **all the time**, kept the mighty forces from being diverted or blocked at any point''(16). Even this limited qualification is hardly enough to give others the proper thanks due to them. To further his own presidential ambitions Wilson rather shamelessly seized the credit for New Jersey's reforms; in so doing, he took the spotlight from men of both parties who had spent so long preparing the ground. He also neglected to praise men like Tumulty and Kerney who had to attend to all the manipulations that he considered to be beneath his dignity. His occasional assertions that he had been fortunate, and well served by his subordinates, are few.

Wilson was not the only person pleased with the legislature's achievements, the local and national press also sang their praise. Some were astute enough to realise that while the reforms were praiseworthy, Wilson was not a pioneer of reform. The measures enacted were commonplace, they merely put New Jersey into line with other states. It was really more of a case of New Jersey catching up with the situation elsewhere, than of her storming ahead alone. The reforms enacted are very similar in scope and outline to acts passed by Hoke Smith in Georgia, LaFollette in Wisconsin, Hiram Johnson in California and Hughes in New York. It was these men who had paved the way for what followed in New Jersey under Wilson rather than the other way around.

Wilson was fortunate to appear on the scene when he did, to be governor of New Jersey when it had a Democrat controlled assembly prepared to push through progressive measures. Yet

he succeeded where the New Ideas Republicans and progressive Democrats had failed. He succeeded because he was able to marshal into a coherent unit the state's progressive forces, now in the ascendent, and have these men enact the legislation that had been previously trumpeted. He helped in the preparation of the legislation, he helped argue the case for reform before the legislature, he endeavoured to whip recalcitrant assemblymen into line by using the threat of the party caucus to determine policy. He was in a sense a prime minister, almost the kind of leader he had written about in his doctoral thesis.

### The Legislative Session 1912

From the beginning Wilson had been fortunate in that the Republican minority had decided to follow his lead in legislative matters. During the 1911 off-year elections that situation changed. Wilson campaigned for the renomination of all the men who had stood by him during the previous session. This was carried to such a length that the campaign almost became a referendum on his programme. The election results were such that his attempt to win an expression of public support can only be judged a failure. The Republicans won 37 of the assembly's 60 seats, and 5 of the Senate's 8 seats which were up for re-election. A Democratic majority of 24 in 1911 became a Republican majority of 14 in 1912. Even though they had lost a seat in the Senate, the Republicans still controlled it by 11 to 10. What the voters obviously wanted was an assurance that the reform programme would be continued. Wilson could not give this, and in any event New Jersey had served its purpose for him - it had won him national recognition and a set of progressive credentials. His efforts were now devoted to seeking the presidency. Clearly, the New Jersey electorate saw through the campaign rhetoric and realised that he had gone as far as he intended. What was lacking, above all else in his speeches, was a definite commitment to reform legislation. His perpetual denunciations of machine politicians and his Republican opponents were simply too negative, and so the electorate turned away from him. Not only did he fail to beat the Republicans, but the Smith machine in Essex county remained intact.

In spite of a promise to cooperate with the legislature in 1912 Wilson did not provide effective leadership for the Republican majority. At no time during the session did he give any sign that

he considered himself to be the leader of the Democratic minority either. He was content to let the routine business of the state plod on without him as he began his campaign for the Democratic presidential nomination. Not once did he meet with the Democratic assemblymen in caucus session, nor did he try to determine party policy or coerce the legislature into passing more reform legislation. There were reasons for this above and beyond his single minded quest for the presidency. The new assembly was dominated by Republicans who were for the most part conservative organisation men. Not only were they loth to help a man they saw as a dangerous radical, they were also anxious to give no further boost to his presidential campaign by passing legislation that might enhance his reputation. Yet even when taking these factors into account one must still conclude that Wilson neglected his duties as governor and party leader. In only one sense did Wilson use this time as governor to good effect, in that he used his power of appointment to greatly strengthen his power among Democratic assemblymen and so laid the foundations of a strong "Wilson for president" coalition in New Jersey.

His relations with the Republican controlled legislature were extremely strained. He vetoed 57 bills during this session alone, including most of the important ones. His behaviour was such that the Republicans of both houses issued a joint statement that was one of the most severe rebukes ever given a governor by the opposition members of a state legislature. It was a sad end to his career as governor, and in many ways mirrors his leave taking from Princeton. As a mark of their disgust the assemblymen piled 150 bills on his desk on the final day of the session, making it impossible for him to study any properly. The final days of the session ended with the Republicans passing bills wholesale over his veto. Wilson summed up his feelings, "this has been a petty and barren legislature. It has done nothing worth mentioning except try to amend and mar the wonderful things we did last year" (17). Hardly a fair comment when one considers the amount of time he spent away from Trenton during the session and how he refused to lead the legislature on the few occasions he was present. The legislative barrenness of 1912 was accentuated by Wilson's neglect and personal limitations. His too frequent absences deprived the legislature of the vital personal leadership that had been so useful in 1911. Once again he displayed his temperamental inability to work with men who were unwilling to follow his lead. He continued the Princeton habit of turning opponents into enemies. Once again he pushed hard for change in the early days and then dried up when the opposition stiffened. The 1912 session saw Wilson's career as governor closing on a low, both as regards his effectiveness as party leader and his popularity with the electorate.



Despite his limitations as a governor Wilson the politician had been a real success in strengthening his ties with his "new constituency", with regard to organised labour Wilson said, "my record as governor of New Jersey is entirely fair to labor .... I do not say it, nor do I like to have it said that I am the laboring man's special friend. I am his friend in the sense that he is part of the country, and I am the country's friend. I do not like to draw class lines .... Ask the New Jersey State Federation of Labor as proof that the educator has been fair"(18). Clearly with regard to labour he was something of a success. The employer's liability - workingmen's compensation act was by no means perfect, but it was a significant improvement on the previous situation. Coming as it had alongside other broadly pro-labour measures it was acceptable to the majority of working people. In 1910 the State Federation had not only condemned Wilson's gubernatorial nomination, but had actually campaigned against him. In 1912 they endorsed his campaign to win the Democratic nomination for the presidency, clearly they did feel the educator was something of a success.

## ENDNOTES

- 1 Wilson to M.A.Hulbert, 26 March 1911, in R.S.Baker and W.E.Dodds, The Public Papers of Woodrow Wilson (New York, 1925-7) Volume 3, pp. 143-4. (hereafter Baker, Wilson Papers).
- 2 Wilson to J.M.Harlan, 23 June 1910, PWW 20, p. 541.
- 3 J.Kerney, The Political Education of Woodrow Wilson, (New York, 1926), p. 81.
- 4 Jersey Journal, 11 November 1910, quoted in Link, Road, p. 210.
- 5 J.W.Westcott to Wilson, 14 November 1910, PWW 22, p. 43.
- 6 Trenton Evening News, 28 February 1911, PWW 22, p. 455.
- 7 Platform of the New Jersey Democratic Party, 15 September 1910, PWW 21, p. 95-6.
- 8 Baker, Wilson Papers, 2, pp. 270-9, 281-2.
- 9 Link, Road, p. 256.
- 10 Wilson to West Hudson Board of Trade, Harrison N. J., 28 February 1911, PWW 22, p. 456-65.
- 11 Noble, New Jersey Progressivism, p. 181.
- 12 Wilson to C.Ford, New York World, 5 June 1912, PWW 23, p. 264.
- 13 Wilson Address, Jersey City NJ, 21 September 1911, PWW 23, p. 342-51.
- 14 Newark Evening News, 23 September 1911, PWW 23, p. 353-4.
- 15 Trenton True American, 8 December 1910, PWW 22, p152.
- 16 Wilson to M.A.Hulbert, 23 April 1911, Baker, Wilson Papers, 3, p. 169-71.
- 17 Wilson to M.A.Hulbert, 1 April 1912, Baker, Wilson Papers, 3, p. 292.
- 18 Chicago Daily Tribune, 7 April 1912, PWW 24, p. 299-302..

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION 1912**

The 1912 presidential election is remembered as the watershed of progressivism, of the fight for the heart of the movement by Wilson and his main opponent Theodore Roosevelt. In this chapter we will see how labour played a central role in the election campaign, for it was here on the tender subjects of labour and immigration control that Wilson was traditionally at his weakest, and where his opponents could attack him with the best hope of success.

#### **Winning The Democratic Nomination**

The congressional and gubernatorial elections of November 1910 had seen the Democrats profit from the divisions within Republican ranks. They resulted in a virtual Democratic landslide in all areas except the Pacific coast. The House became Democrat controlled for the first time since 1892, and with the support of insurgent Republicans the Democrats in the Senate had a working majority at long last. In addition, 1910 had seen many Democratic governors elected in traditionally Republican states, among them Wilson in New Jersey. Practically every Democratic newspaper in the country believed that with the nomination of a new candidate the party could also capture the presidency in 1912.

The schism in the Republican party deepened throughout 1911 as party insurgents clashed with Taft over policy. Few old line Democratic politicians had committed themselves to any candidate by the end of 1911, but Wilson's legislative triumphs in New Jersey made him an early favourite. Conditions for him could not have been better with newspapers throughout the country praising the achievements of the legislature. Thus, in spite of the antipathy of many of the party bosses and conservatives who viewed his actions, utterances and early attack on Smith with serious misgivings, he was rapidly becoming a serious presidential possibility. "I do not feel that I shall ever come to undertake an active campaign for the presidential nomination. I should feel that a nomination obtained in that way was hardly worth having,"<sup>(1)</sup> wrote Wilson in June 1911. Yet within eight months of those words he made a nine thousand

mile transcontinental tour, and campaigned in Georgia, North and South Carolina, Virginia, Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, Texas and New York state.

Since 1907 Wilson had been groomed for the presidency by George Harvey and his business associates. However, from 1909 onwards, as he became aware of a rising radical feeling gripping the nation, Wilson was obliged to re-define some of his earlier beliefs. This could not be done without comment: **The New York Sun** asked ‘‘Is Wilson Bryanizing?’’<sup>(2)</sup> Using a series of rhetorical questions it alleged that Wilson’s political ambition was running away with him, and that he would do anything to win office. This changeability worried many, as W. McCombs, his campaign manager pointed out: ‘‘I spent last night with Mr Louis Wiley, business manager of the New York Times .... (I asked him) ‘What do you think of Wilson?’ The answer was, ‘He is a radical and his views are subject to change for political reasons’’<sup>(3)</sup>. This belief that he was departing from moderate, mainstream Democracy began to worry his early backers. Between December 1911 and May 1912 many of his original supporters began to have doubts about their advocacy of his candidacy, and some even began to conspire against him. Among the plotters were Harvey, Watterson and Hemphill, men who had played a leading part in creating the Wilson candidacy. Once they were no longer certain of their ability to control him they orchestrated a campaign to ruin him.

This campaign was helped by attacks made on Wilson by the newspapers of W. R. Hearst, which were supporting Champ Clark. They attacked Wilson on his weakest fronts: his early views on unions and immigrants. This was so telling it was later used by his rivals in the actual campaign itself, and it is there that we will look at it. The Harvey campaign of vilification came to nothing when Wilson was able to show how honourably he had handled the rupture with the now disgruntled colonel. The break with Harvey actually helped Wilson further enhance his progressive standing. Harvey’s support had always laid him open to suspicion among Bryan Democrats. ‘‘The best thing that could happen to Wilson at this time would be his open repudiation by those publications (Harvey’s **Harper’s Weekly**) that are now speaking kindly of him’’, <sup>(4)</sup> Bryan wrote in 1911 shortly before the break. With the departure of Harvey the Wilson campaign was run by enthusiastic amateurs.

As the Democratic convention drew closer a number of clear candidates emerged. The strongest was Champ Clark, the Speaker of the House. He was a man of the Bryan type, who had accumulated a consistent progressive record over the years, though he had never originated any legislation or taken the lead in any important movement. His critics saw him as a rather narrow and provincial politician of undistinguished intellect; Wilson wrote him off as "a sort of elephantine, smart Aleck"(5). He had, however, inherited most of Bryan's following in the Middle and Far West, and had also acquired the not inconsiderable support of Hearst. Many time-serving Democratic politicians and state organisations gave Clark their support as they distrusted Wilson, especially after the attack on Smith. For a while Judson Harmon, the conservative governor of Ohio, looked like an opponent, but his star died as it became obvious that only a progressive could be elected, or at least someone who could pass for one.

Clark arrived in Baltimore with 436 delegates, while Wilson could count on only 248 at the very most. The emergence of Wilson as a national Democratic figure at first seemed to threaten the developing Democrat-AFL alliance. He was still renowned for his early distaste for labour and its principles. Thus in 1912 the AFL was in the anti-Wilson camp, preferring Clark. In the early balloting Clark established a strong lead. On the tenth ballot Tammany Hall moved to back him, which looked like the signal for landslide, as Clark already had 556 votes, well over a majority. Under the rules of the convention, however, a candidate who obtained a majority had to go on to win two-thirds backing. The landslide did not materialise as the Wilson and Underwood delegations were held in check. A gruelling campaign then began to wear down Clark's support. Only by Machiavellian diplomacy could Wilson's managers win the backing they needed, and on the forty sixth ballot Wilson finally won the majority he needed. Clark offered his support, but was clearly bitter: "they (Clark's supporters) made the fight, gave me a 200,000 majority in the States where Governor Wilson and I competed in the primaries and caused me to lead on thirty ballots in the convention, in nine of which I had a clear majority. Nevertheless, the nomination was bestowed upon Governor Wilson"(6).

Wilson's victory represented the triumph of eastern Democracy over Bryanism, leaving the agrarians with little real power within the party. Wilson effected a reconciliation with Bryan for appearances' sake. In reality he could barely tolerate the man's style and manners. In his acceptance speech Wilson promised to reduce the tariff, restrict trusts, reform the currency and

banking systems, prevent financial confederacies and pass laws to help the workingman. How all this was to be done was left intentionally vague.

### **The Republican Party Divides - The Birth Of The Progressive Party**

In the 1910 elections there had been what amounted to a mass repudiation of Taft's leadership. Republican insurgents made it plain soon afterwards that they would not tolerate his renomination in 1912. These progressives now constituted a majority of the party in the Mid and Far West. They had a fairly coherent programme of tariff and trust reform, all they lacked was a dynamic leader of national standing to be their standard bearer. Taft's problems were worsened by the alienation of many of the party's key business supporters because of his anti-trust programme. In January 1911 the insurgent Republicans came together to oppose Taft's renomination and formed the National Progressive Republican League, which included in its membership many senators, governors and congressmen. The League supported Senator R.M.LaFollette of Wisconsin and tried to obtain public backing from Roosevelt. The ex-president dealt carefully with them. On 10 February 1912 Roosevelt surprised many people when he announced his own candidacy. The pre-convention campaign that followed was undoubtedly the bitterest in the history of the party. In the thirteen states where voters could express a preference Roosevelt won 278 delegates, Taft 48 and LaFollette 35 (7). Taft however used the patronage steam roller to obtain control of southern delegations, he also had the support of most boss-controlled states. With the help of the National Committee the outcome of the convention in Chicago was a foregone conclusion. Taft gave himself 235 of the 254 contested seats, and then proceeded to nominate himself using the self-same tactics Roosevelt perfected in 1908. Roosevelt walked out calling cheat and set about forming a third party.

On 6 August 1912 the Progressive party was born in Chicago. It made Roosevelt its presidential candidate and Hiram Johnson his running mate. The party platform was significant in that national social justice groups and other advanced progressives found approval for their objectives by a major, if somewhat ephemeral party. Thus measures like a minimum wage for women, prohibition of child labour, workingmen's compensation and social insurance were all in the party platform. But the bulk of the party's membership was more linked to Roosevelt

the man than it was to any political programme. Amos Pinchot later said of the party “though we did not realise it, the Progressive party came into being, a house divided against itself and already heavily mortgaged”(8).

### **The Socialist Party of America in 1912**

While the two main candidates were obliged to appear radical while remaining essentially conservative, this was not a problem faced by the SPA. Their steady electoral rise worried many: Herbert Croly actually saw progressivism as being “designed to serve as a counterpoise to the threat of working class revolution”(9). He was not alone, Louis Brandeis was talking of the need for “a bulwark against the great wave of socialism”(10). Roosevelt felt that the “great growth of socialism in this country (is) far more ominous than any populist movement in times past”(11).

The SPA vote had grown larger with each year of the new century. In 1900 Eugene Debs had polled almost 100,000 votes in the presidential election with no real political organisation, this was three times larger than any other American socialist had ever polled. With each year the SPA membership rolls and influence grew even larger. Between 1904 and 1908 SPA membership rose from 20,763 to 41,751 members, and by 1912 it had further increased to 117,984. Never before had America seen a party grow so quickly. In the 1908 elections Debs polled 420,713 votes. His personal success was more than matched elsewhere, socialists were elected to many municipal, state and federal positions. 33 towns had socialist administrations and there were 79 socialist majors in 24 states. The SPA now had 1200 local offices in over 340 cities. While it is an oversimplification to say that socialism caused progressivism, by 1912 the three main parties were pushing reformist measures, in part at least, to slow the SPA growth.

## The Presidential Campaign - Wilson And Roosevelt As Candidates

By the middle of August 1912 it was obvious that Taft was simply not in the running. As early as 12 July he wrote his wife, 'I think I might as well give up so far as being a candidate is concerned. There are so many people in the country who do not like me' (12). Except for his speech accepting the Republican nomination the President refused to join in any further speechmaking at all. Wilson and Roosevelt carried the burden of the campaign, and it was the battle between them which was to decide who would be president. Ideologically, the progressive movement culminated and diverged in the philosophies and programmes they set forth. W.A.White was not alone when he lampooned their programmes as 'that fantastic imaginary gulf that has always existed between Tweedle-Dum and Tweedle-Dee' (13).

As the campaign progressed Wilson was forced to fabricate a programme in order to win over sufficient independents and insurgent Republicans. The series of speeches that grew out of this need were given the name 'The New Freedom'. Most of this programme was supplied by Louis Brandeis. In the early stages of the campaign, certainly up to August, Wilson was clearly undecided on how best to proceed. He was having trouble finding a great issue with which to carry the people. On 28 August he met Brandeis, one of the leading progressive lawyers in the country, an outstanding authority on monopoly control, railway regulation, and the chief spokesman of the philosophy of regulated competition, unhampered enterprise and economic freedom. This meeting transformed Wilson's emphasis on many questions, but especially on trusts. On 28 September Brandeis sent Wilson a draft of a magazine article he was preparing for **Collier's Weekly**. This paper summarised all of the lawyer's many proposals with regard to trust control. From this article Wilson drew all the ideas he expounded during the remainder of the campaign. His analysis became much more perceptive after seeing Brandeis. He moved away from his earlier simplistic and unworkable position on trusts to the more realistic, if still reassuringly vague set of points passed to him by Brandeis. The lawyer reinforced Wilson in his belief that most businessmen were men of good will, and that there was no contradiction between the concentration of wealth and political democracy.

While much of Wilson's programme came courtesy of Brandeis, Roosevelt had Herbert Croly to thank for his new insightfulness. Croly's **Promise of American Life** summarised advanced progressive thought and it was only after reading it that Roosevelt could define his 'New



Nationalism'' at Osawatamie in August 1910 with any real clarity. The journalist's argument for the need to use Hamiltonian intervention to help achieve Jeffersonian ends fired Roosevelt's imagination. Roosevelt's advocacy of national government recognizing the inevitability of the concentration of wealth and industry, bringing corporations under federal control, and protecting workingmen all owe much to Croly.

### The Presidential Campaign - The Labour Dimension

Politics in 1912 was determined by two questions, the relationship of government to industry, and the rise of socialism; and each had its own labour dimension. It was in the areas of labour and immigration that Wilson was traditionally at his weakest. It was here that his opponents could attack him with greatest ease and with the best chance of success. He had been savaged here in 1910 when campaigning for the governorship of New Jersey, and also while campaigning for the Democratic presidential nomination in 1912. Thus it was here again that his rivals launched their attacks during the campaign itself. His early writing clearly shows an enmity towards workingmen and a prejudice against certain types of the newer immigrant. In an effort to offset the criticism of many Polish, Italian, Jewish and other immigrant groups he publically wrote to the publishers of his **History of the American People** asking them to delete the offending passages from volume five until he could find time to rewrite them. He also claimed, as he always did in similar situations, that his critics were misquoting him and misrepresenting his views. The fact that many immigrant groups later backed him during the campaign is proof that his disclaimers were believed, although he never did actually rewrite the offending passages.

Wilson's labour strategy worked along similar lines, he would renounce his earlier words, claim he was misunderstood and then go on to promise a new beginning. On 12 August one of his advisors, J.W.Kern wrote to him enclosing the draft of a letter he was planning to send to Sam Gompers, which read,

I write to remind you (Gompers) of the action of the Democratic National Convention, at Baltimore in adopting a platform which insofar as its declarations on the labor question are concerned was written by yourself and adopted by the Committee on Resolutions without the dotting of an 'i' or the crossing of a 't'. I also remind you of the action of the Democratic House of Representatives in Washington in redeeming the pledges of the Denver Platform (1908). In view of the above facts, is it not in fairness due to the Democratic party from your federation, that its executive council which meets in Atlantic City next week should by resolution, or otherwise show its appreciations (14).

The need for the Democratic party to secure the votes of organised labour meant that Wilson had no other choice but to approach the AFL in this way. Equally Sam Gompers had no real option but to accept the overtures even though he had initially preferred Champ Clark and still had doubts about Wilson. Gompers and the AFL refused to openly endorse any candidate, this was partly due to the AFL constitution which did not allow partisan political action, and also because many AFL officers were active Republicans. Yet as the campaign progressed it became clear that the AFL supported Wilson much as they had Bryan in 1908. In the October 1912 edition of **The American Federationist** Gompers condemned Taft and the Republican platform and praised the Wilson labour plank, which is hardly surprising as he had written it himself! He also stated that while the Progressive party's platform commitments to labour were gratifying, labour had found it impossible to obtain legislative protection when Roosevelt was president and so he could not now be trusted. In November shortly before the election Gompers formally endorsed Wilson and the AFL national office in Washington served as a Democratic clearing house for the labour.

Gompers and the AFL were pressing hard for an elaborate programme that included federal aid for industrial education, a measure to loosen the labour contracts of seamen in American ports, the restriction of immigration, but most important of all was their desire to win immunity from prosecution from acts which the Supreme Court said violated the Sherman Act. The AFL wanted an amendment that would give unions specific immunity from existing prohibitions. Bryan had promised them this when he incorporated Gompers paper into the Democratic platform in 1908. Gompers took the 1912 platform, which included the 1908 pledge, and the Kern-Wilson letter to mean that Wilson supported the measures advocated. Shortly before the

election Taft vetoed the Sundry Civil Appropriations bill because of its rider (the Hughes-Hamill amendment) that prevented the Department of Justice from spending any of its funds on the prosecution of unions. Gompers made it clear that if the bill and its rider were not endorsed by Wilson it would seem that he was insincere. Gompers had staked a great deal of his personal authority within the AFL on this approach.

Wilson was also under pressure to endorse the Seamen's bill which called for severe safety standards on all ships entering America, which wanted to establish standards to regulate hours worked, hoped to improve the living conditions of American sailors and to abolish imprisonment for seamen who violated their contracts while in American ports. Wilson agreed to these conditions to Gompers' satisfaction.

The final item on the AFL programme was the restriction of immigration. The AFL claimed that unrestricted immigration depressed wages, created an unskilled labour surplus and multiplied the difficulties of unions trying to organise the basic industries. There is much truth in labour's claims on unrestricted immigration depressing the labour market, but the fact that many AFL unions operated a colour bar or would not even attempt to organise immigrants weakens their case. The AFL were not the only group advocating restriction, many other groups desired the same goal. While the AFL tried to paint their demands in economic terms many of these other groups were more openly racist. Wilson would not support the AFL on this issue. His supporters argue he took this stand as calls for restriction were unAmerican and morally wrong, startling words when one considers what he wrote in his **History of the American People** or to Senator Phelan in May 1912. His critics point to his political malleability and to his need to secure large quantities of the votes of recent immigrants, and claim this alone accounts for his aversion to restriction. A more likely explanation is that Wilson felt he could win support from both labour and immigrant groups by endorsing large chunks of the labour programme whilst simultaneously putting a block on immigration control. His electoral success in 1912 seems to suggest he was correct.

Securing the late endorsement of the AFL was not in itself enough for Wilson and his campaign managers as the AFL represented only a small percentage of all workingmen. Thus more had to be done to allay the remaining suspicions of other workers. Throughout 1912 Wilson was

scheduled to speak before workingmen and to endorse labour issues. These speeches fall into two periods, one series was made as he sought the Democratic nomination in January to March 1912, the second series was delivered mainly in September to October 1912 when he was in the grip of his battle with Roosevelt. In his first speech of 1912 he had endorsed labour's right to strike against exploitative management, going on to say, "the high cost of production is, almost in every instance, due not to high wages, but to the loss and waste in respect of bad management .... You need more intelligent workers and you cannot get them except at a higher price"(15). While in Boston speaking to a convention of real estate brokers he said, "you cannot get the best work out of your workmen unless you make them by honest operations believe that you regard them, not as your tools, but as your partners"(16), and also argued that employers should not overwork their employees but should pay them adequately for work done. A variation on the same theme was delivered at both Richmond on 1 February and in Philadelphia the next day. Wilson then turned away from labour issues making his speeches broader and more national in scope as he challenged for the Democratic nomination. It was not until Labor Day in September that he again spoke exclusively on labour matters. Speaking in Buffalo he sought to identify himself with the nation's wage earners saying that they constituted the country. He ridiculed Roosevelt's call for a minimum wage for women saying that "if a minimum wage is established by law, the temptation for every employer will be to bring his wages down to that minimum"(17). He castigated large corporations for excluding unions from their plants, but insisted it was not the government's place to interfere for "the minute you are taken care of by government you are wards and not independent men"(17), something that Gompers and the AFL had always believed. On 14 September he addressed a workingman's dinner in New York and claimed that the Aldrich tariff did not, as was claimed by the Republicans, protect American workers, but in actual fact depressed their wages for pay was higher in unprotected industries than in protected. Speaking in South Dakota on 18 September and in Detroit the next day he repeated his words on the tariff and again attacked large corporations for excluding unions. In Hartford on 25 September and Cleveland on 11 October he actually spoke glowingly of the actions of the Lawrence textile workers for striking against the oppression they suffered, to have him endorse an IWW strike must have been startling! At Scranton on 23 September he again attacked the tariff and large corporations for hurting both unions and the workingmen. At Fall River on 26 September he again praised the Lawrence strikers, attacked US Steel by name, called for higher wages and said he would recognize labour's right to organise, which was not yet guaranteed by the constitution. He repeated parts of the same speech at Peru on 4 October and Topeka on 8 October when he again attacked US Steel for excluding unions from their plants. In Madison Square Garden on 31

October he spoke of the need to protect women, children and the poor. All of these were supplemented with interviews and articles, all designed to allay the suspicion that he was anti-union or anti-workingman.

Another issue that both main candidates had to address themselves to was the question of socialism. Both Wilson and Roosevelt confronted the issue partly to attract radical voters themselves, and partly to weaken the SPA. Wilson centred his attack around a few key themes, chief among them being that the Socialists were “revelling in utopian dreams and that their theories are impossible, but that he could not help but admire the spirit that was behind it”(18). Throughout the campaign Wilson would periodically return to the idea that socialism was impractical, utopian, and that the voters should beware of men claiming to have answers to all questions. These themes were most often expounded when talking to working class audiences. Another theme he found to be useful was to dismiss the rise in the SPA vote as a protest vote. A story he would often repeat was of his being approached by a socialist mayor - E E Mouck, mayor of Wymore City, Nebraska. Mouck is supposed to have analysed his electoral success thus, “it was about 20% socialist and 80% protest”(19). Wilson would then say that the protest had been noted and that his party would no longer neglect the working people.

On 14 October 1912 Roosevelt was shot and injured by an insane anti-third party fanatic while in Milwaukee, this effectively finished what remained of the two horse race. Wilson was prevailed upon to refrain from further active campaigning as it would appear unsporting. It mattered little by then anyway as it was becoming increasingly obvious that Wilson was going to win. On 5 November 1912 Wilson polled 6,293,019 votes, Roosevelt 4,119,507, Taft 3,484,956 and Debs 901,873(20). Largely because of the multiple division of the vote, Wilson's victory in the electoral college was of landslide proportions. Taft, carrying only Vermont and Utah, received 8 electoral votes. Roosevelt won 11 of California's votes and all of Michigan, Minnesota, Pennsylvannia, South Dakota and Washington for a total of 88 votes. Wilson received the 435 that remained. Wilson did not poll as many popular votes as Bryan in 1908. Nor did he succeed in establishing the Democrats as the majority party in Congress, they had only a tenuous two year control of the House. Outside of the old confederate states and Kentucky he polled a majority of the popular vote only in Arizona. Neither Roosevelt nor Taft was responsible for the decrease in the Democratic vote for their combined vote in 1912 is still lower than Taft's vote in 1908. Thus it would appear that roughly half a million voters

refused to back either Wilson or Roosevelt and voted instead for Debs. By capturing six percent of the popular vote he secured the best ever vote for the SPA. As with the other parties, the SPA vote was not uniformly spread, they polled well in Western states - in Washington, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, California and Arizona.

Clearly the division in the Republican ranks helped above all else in securing the presidency for the Democrats. For the second time in American history the party in the majority lost the presidency through internecine strife. The overall election results show how important the labour vote was becoming to the Democrats. Taft and the Republicans, the only party offering labour nothing, got less than twenty five percent of the popular vote. AFL assistance obviously did not harm Wilson's candidacy as some had feared it would. Roosevelt waged a magnificent campaign, but the election results show that he failed to draw progressive Democrats in any real number away from Wilson, and that alone heralded defeat. More important for the future of American politics, Roosevelt failed to establish the Progressive party on a firm and lasting basis. Roosevelt's vote was too personal, linked too closely to him as a man and not to his programme. Many people simply refused to believe in his sincerity; although he offered labour more by way of legislation than Wilson, Gompers and the AFL remembered him as an unfriendly president. Anne Howard Shaw when writing to Jane Addams voiced the suspicions of many, "I wish I could believe he (Roosevelt) intended to do a single honest thing or that he would carry out a single plank in the platform if elected.... I cannot"(21).

In time labour among many others would voice similar doubts about Wilson when he began to draw away from his own platform pledges, to such an extent that many historians doubt that he was ever a genuine progressive at all. As we shall see in the next chapter between 1913 and 1916 Wilson either obstructed or refused to encourage the fulfilment of a large part of the progressive programme he had agreed to in 1912, and this was most marked where pro-labour legislation is concerned.

## ENDNOTES

- 1 Wilson to J.A.Hoyt, 22 June 1911, PWW 23, p. 171.
- 2 New York Sun, 31 July 1911, PWW 23, p. 243.
- 3 W.F.McCombs to Wilson, 23 September 1911, PWW 23, p. 355.
- 4 Link, Road, p. 360.
- 5 ibid, p. 329.
- 6 Champ Clark to St. Louis Republican, 3 July 1912, quoted in Link, Road, p. 462.
- 7 G.E.Mowry, Theodore Roosevelt and the Progressive Movement (Boston, 1946), p. 172.
- 8 A.Pinchof, A History of the Progressive Party (New York, 1958), p. 210.
- 9 J.Weinstein, The Corporate Ideal in the Liberal State, (New York, 1968) , p. 15.
- 10 ibid, p. 17.
- 11 ibid, p. 17.
- 12 A.S.Link, Woodrow Wilson and the Progressive Era (New York, 1954), p. 217.
- 13 Link, Road, p. 476.
- 14 J.W.Kern to Wilson (with enclosure to S.Gompers) 12 August 1912, PWW 25, p. 22-3.
- 15 Wilson Address to National Democratic Club of New York. 3 January 1912, PWW 23, p. 637-50.
- 16 Wilson Address to real estate brokers in Boston, 27 January 1912, PWW 23, p. 679-84.
- 17 Wilson Labor Day Address in Buffalo, 2 September 1912, PWW 25, p. 69-79.
- 18 Savannah Gazette, 20 April 1912, PWW 24, p. 349-51.
- 19 Wilson Address, Peru Indiana, to workingman, 4 October 1912, PWW 25, p. 332-8.
- 20 Link, Road, p. 524.
- 21 A.H.Shaw to J.Addams, 16 August 1912, Link, Progressive Era , p. 22.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### THE FIRST ADMINISTRATION

This chapter will open with the Democratic party struggling to cobble together a definite programme of government from the beguiling jargon of the New Freedom. We shall examine how Wilson handled this problem, and also those other problems bequeathed him by Taft such as the Colorado miner's strike and the Commission on Industrial Relations.

We shall then concentrate upon the reforms enacted prior to the 1914 mid-term elections and the struggles surrounding the Clayton Act, the Seamen's Act and immigration control. It will be shown that Wilson reneged upon the promises he made to the AFL during the New Freedom campaign. This chapter will show that it was only the poor Democratic showing in the 1914 elections that turned Wilson into an active progressive after 1914.

After an analysis of his intervention during the threatened rail stoppage of 1916 this chapter will show how he hoped to rein in the IWW but that his officials could find no legal precedent to justify hostile action against them. By the close of the chapter we will see how the AFL had become a firm, if peripheral, part of the Democratic party.

### The New Democratic Administration

Wilson arrived in Washington as an unknown quantity in national politics and with his reputation as party leader still to be made. Remembering his conservative upbringing and utterances, many people still felt that his New Jersey governorship, whilst promising much, was not sufficient proof in itself of his progressive transformation. People acknowledged that he was a consummate orator, but while endlessly eloquent, he remained disturbingly vague. Charles Merriam recalled his "outstanding gift of statement which enabled him to attract support to a general spirit rather than a specific program, to avoid unpleasant commitments in dubious cases"(1). Thus no-one was really sure what Wilson actually planned to do. It was from Brandeis that he had received a more specific vocabulary during the New Freedom



campaign, but even here he fought shy of the welfare legislation advanced by Roosevelt. Wilson's commitment to pro-worker legislation was modest, having been written by Sam Gompers in 1908. Not only had Wilson no clear or detailed labour policy when he took office, but his fundamental attitude towards the problem had been too recently defined to be completely his own. He had as yet merely adopted the opinions of others. All he had decided was that his party needed to advocate "something" about labour, his language allowing the inference that he had decided that the "something" should not be "aimless and baseless." Whether he ever did in fact work out this problem is doubtful. Take advice and delegate he certainly did, but it is open to debate whether he ever acted in a more coherent manner.

The four months between the election and inauguration afforded scant time to accomplish the large task that lay ahead of him and his advisors. They had to map out plans for a legislative programme and to organise a government almost from the ground up. The party was rusty when it came to the mechanisms of national management, having been out of office for so long. Labour's request for remedial legislation thus came low on Wilson's list of policy requirements. He felt his most immediate objectives were reducing the tariff, reforming the currency and banking systems, and a modification of the Sherman Act to prevent monopolisation - although obviously labour was hoping that some of that modification would involve a re-examination of the injunction issue.

The fact that the Democrats had been out of office for seventeen years gave the president a potentially strong hand in forcing the party to his will. The Republican rupture meant that the Democrats could look forward to a majority of 73 in the House during the first two years of the administration. Moreover, many of the Democrats were new and inexperienced - 114 of the 290 had been returned for the first time. In addition, the old time party leaders Adamson, Clayton and Underwood all realised that the fate of their party depended largely upon their performance. It is significant that the first Wilson administration closed with major pieces of legislation bearing each of these men's names.

## The Department of Labor

The idea behind a separate Department of Labor had been put forward originally by W.H.Sylvester in 1867. It was forty six years before the idea came to fruition. A Bureau of Labor had existed since the mid-1880s when one was created in the Department of the Interior. Four years after its creation it became independent, but still without executive rank. So as the first ever Secretary of Labor William Wilson's was the task of organising a new department. He was ably assisted by his deputy Louis Post, a distinguished single taxer and union supporter. The names of Brandeis, Gardner and Redfield all came up before the position of first Secretary of Labor went to William Wilson. Ralph Easley of the NCF had hoped to see John Mitchell of the UMW gain the honour, but Sam Gompers objected to one of his vice-presidents' names going forward, so the post went to Wilson, himself an ex-UMW official. Labour was delighted with William Wilson's selection and hoped it was an indication that the new administration would support other labour measures. Gompers rather predictably hailed it as a justification of his non-partisan policies, and thought it was wonderful "to have someone as its directing head who can carry the viewpoint of labour into the councils of the President"(2).

Others did not agree - more attention was paid to William Wilson's appointment than any other, with the exception of Bryan. The **New York Times** claimed he was "appointed virtually at the instigation of Samuel Gompers"(3), while the **New York Herald** believed he would make his new post a "department of union labor"(4). The NAM, which had helped ensure that he was not re-elected as congressman for Pennsylvania in 1912, was very critical of his selection. Their criticism was well placed as William Wilson did see himself as being a partisan of unionism, and whenever possible he chose unionists or those sympathetic to labour when selecting personnel. His department collaborated closely with the AFL from the very beginning. The Railroad Brotherhoods, being distrustful of the AFL, kept themselves aloof. As it was considered to be irresponsible the IWW was not encouraged to approach the department, and Wilson would not open his facilities to them.

The new department had four divisions - Labor Statistics, the Childrens' Bureau, Naturalization and Immigration. The Bureau of Immigration absorbed 70% of department appropriations and 90% of personnel. Of the 2,000 employees in the new department, all but 200 were in immigration. Post lampooned this function as "a government agency for keeping aliens

out''(5). Above and beyond these duties, the department was to consider all questions on wages, hours and conditions in all government workshops, as well as the smooth functioning of the administration's labour policies.

### The Commission on Industrial Relations (CIR)

On entering office Wilson inherited problems passed to him by his predecessor, one of which was overseeing the creation and investigative endeavours of the CIR. As a result of the **Los Angeles Times- McNamara** case the federal government had set up the commission. It was a tripartite group which was empowered to examine the reasons behind the growth of violent industrial unrest and to recommend solutions. Taft's original group of nine had been vetoed by Congress, Wilson now had the task of selecting a new panel. The situation demanded some urgency J.J.McNamara had been a high union official, a conservative pro-AFL unionist, and according to Victor Berger a member of the Militia of Christ. If such a man deemed it necessary to dynamite buildings and kill then capital-labour relations were in a serious condition.

Brandeis described the prevailing industrial atmosphere thus, "there is unrest everywhere. Never before have conditions been so miserably bad. Capital and labour are not satisfied, and we are having clash after clash. The situation looks worse and the future gloomy. It has been said that we are now experiencing such times as preceded the French Revolution"(6). By 1912 growing conservative opposition to progressivism, coupled with the increasing appeal of radical doctrines, was accentuating class tensions. Violence in labour disputes became almost a daily occurrence between 1913-1916, with **causes célèbres** like Joseph Hillstrom, Tom Mooney and the Everett Massacre only adding to the tension. After the **Los Angeles Times** explosion many people were keen to halt this slide into violence. The AFL were only too willing to help, and in the process to present themselves as the face of moderate, safe and legitimate labour. Many influential men, Wilson among them, were prepared to help them, especially if it meant they could head off the more hot-headed elements like the IWW. Thus Wilson excluded radicals and the IWW from the CIR, eight of whose nine members came from the NCF. The three labour representatives were described by Easley as being "anti-socialist to the core"(7). Garretson was a Railroad Brotherhood chief, while Connell and Lennon were senior AFL officials and activists in the Militia of Christ, a catholic organisation pledged to

keeping radicalism and socialism out of union affairs. Hoping to cool the ardour of some of the more extreme labour elements Brandeis wrote Wilson on 13, 26 and 27 May 1913 (8) asking him to select an IWW member as one of the labour representatives. Wilson felt himself unable to do so because of the IWW's violent reputation. Erring on the side of caution he accepted the Taft labour slate which had been put forward by Easley and Gompers. The president also asked William Wilson to canvas labour on the subject of their representation, but as he confined himself to asking only pro-AFL/NCF elements it is hardly surprising they endorsed the conservative selection. Wilson also obliterated NAM representation, fearing them to be an employers' IWW. Thus moderates dominated, radicals and arch-conservatives were disappointed. It is perhaps ironic that those who tended to turn to violence first in industrial disputes, on both the capital and labour sides, should have been excluded from participation in the CIR, and thus from being given an opportunity to become involved in the democratic process. Brandeis refused the offer of the chairmanship, but suggested Frank Walsh, a lawyer and pro-Wilson Democrat from the Mid-West.

Sitting from 1913 until 1915 the CIR was the largest ever study of American industry. Its operation was divided into two parts, one was a series of open sessions where the commission members took testimony and questioned prominent witnesses. The other part was analytical research carried out by a band of trained academics who specialised in labour matters. The CIR gathered evidence in the industrial heartlands of America. Some of its most vocal critics, however, were actually Democrats. Coming mainly from south of the Mason-Dixon line, they insisted that Wilson keep the CIR out of their states. They were especially anxious to avoid the study of child labour. Wilson bowed to their pressure, as he was later to do with legislation on the same subject. Thus apart from its investigations in Texas the CIR stayed out of the area.

When the commission reported in 1915 its contribution to advancing capital-labour relations was undermined by splits over its findings, although it had already been seriously weakened by the Congress elected in 1914 which would not continue its funding. In the final reports the labour representatives backed Walsh. As a result the employers submitted a report of their own, as did commission members Commons and Harriman. Obviously such splits played into the hand of those in office who were hostile to it. Congress treated all the reports with rough hands, apart from applauding its courage and endeavours they sat on its many recommendations.

In one of the most radical documents ever published by the federal government Walsh put capitalism in the dock. Not only were workers being denied basic human rights he claimed, but they were also being denied the right to organise. To redress the balance in workers' favour he called for independent unions to be made a central objective of federal policy, and for the Department of Labor to prosecute unfair labour practices. Many of his other recommendations were unsubstantiated by hard evidence, which was obviously a serious weakness. The two other reports were confined to attacking the Walsh line. The employers condemned irresponsible capital and labour, and hoped moderates on both sides would work together. Commons and Harriman stood in the middle arguing for impartial arbitration agencies. The combination of a radical majority report and a split commission meant that nothing substantive came from it. Conservatives in and out of congress damned its findings, while both Gompers and his radical *bête noir* Debs welcomed its many recommendations.

Wilson congratulated the members of the CIR and then largely forgot about it, mainly because there was never a concentrated call upon him from any really powerful source to act on it. He did reject calls to remove Walsh as chairman when he attacked J.D. Rockefeller, but apart from that he would go no further. Acting on a radical document before a hostile and antagonistic Congress was too politically dangerous for a man with Wilson's political pedigree. Thus whilst the CIR had an educational effect upon sections of the public about working conditions its many recommendations were not instituted in a scientific manner until the New Deal era.

### The Colorado Mining Strike

One area where Wilson and the CIR directly overlapped was the mining strike in Colorado which began in 1913 and continued long into 1914. A letter from William Wilson to the president summarises the sticking point between the mine operators (led primarily by the Colorado Fuel and Iron Company - CFI - a Rockefeller subsidiary) and the UMW, it also outlines the early history of the dispute and says a great deal about how industrial concerns in America managed their industrial relations in times of conflict:

The position taken by the operators defending their refusal to have business dealings with the UMW is based upon the assumption that the UMW is a lawless organization ... that its officers have encouraged intimidation, assaults, arson, murder, armed resistance to organized government. If this arraignment were true the operators would be justified in refusing to deal ... (however) during the strike it has been the universal policy of the officers of the organization to use their influence to have the strikers conduct themselves in a peaceful manner .... The charge that the UMW is a lawless organization whose officers promote violence would have greater force if it came from men who had been conservators of peace. They (the operators) have maintained for years armed guards who have been used to intimidate the workers .... On 23 September 1915 Frank Hayes (Vice President of the UMW) said a strike was imminent unless the operators would meet representatives of the workmen .... On 5 September 1913 I appointed Ethelbert Stewart (chief clerk in the Bureau of Labor Statistics) to act as a conciliator.... The operators claim there were only 2,048 union members out of 23,000 miners employed. The vote was unanimous in favour of striking. It is difficult to imagine such a small union nucleus being able to accomplish such acts without real support .... Insurrection and anarchy have prevailed for some time in the coal regions of Colorado, but that the mine workers are solely responsible for that condition may well be questioned (9).

The mineowners were quick to dismiss the Department of Labor's officials, their point of view and their offers of help. They attacked the department head claiming that as an ex-UMW official himself he could hardly be impartial. They also claimed that his officers were overtly pro-union. It is certainly true that many employees in the department were former union officers, a high percentage of them actually coming from the UMW. This was one of the reasons that Congress was so opposed to the department and caused so much trouble each year over its appropriations. So telling was the criticism that Post was obliged to contact Wilson's secretary J.P. Tumulty in an attempt to dispel any doubts that may have been forming in the president's mind. He pointed out "Stewart's reputation for wide and trustworthy knowledge of details surrounding industrial problems" and "that he is not a leader in union circles" Post also noted that "there is a Feudal system in the territory of the CFI," and that Wilson and Stewart had every right to intervene as "the Department of Labor is prescribed as 'to foster, promote and develop the welfare of the wage earners of the United States to improve their

working conditions and advance their opportunities for employment,” and because “the Secretary of Labor is empowered to act as a mediator and to appoint commissions of conciliation in labor disputes whenever in his judgement the interests of industrial peace may require it”(10).

Whilst there were numerous points at issue, ranging from working conditions unique to the area to the threatening behaviour of the operators, “the only question of any real importance, is the demand of the UMW for recognition of their union and the abandonment of the open shop policy”(11), stated L.M.Bowers, a CFI manager in a letter to Wilson, and around this issue an impasse developed. The UMW were willing to accept arbitration, but as the operators refused to bend on the subject of union recognition the dispute continued long into 1914. The situation rapidly degenerated into open violence with deaths on both sides, as tended to be the case during labour disputes in Western territories. Wilson stood by the efforts of his department officials, for as he told J.F. Welborn, a senior official at CFI, “the Department of Labor is empowered by act of Congress to exercise its good offices in trade and labor disputes for the purpose, if possible, of bringing about a just and amicable settlement”. He also backed Stewart, saying he was “a trusted representative of the department sent to attempt to bring about a conference between the operators and the miners, and that he was sad that “he met with complete failure,” and that “his efforts were not welcomed”(12).

Matters came to a head in April 1914 when E.L.Doyle, a UMW official, told Wilson that “verified reports today show that 4 men were murdered and 6 women and 15 children cremated when operators’ mine guards dressed as militiamen attacked Ludlow Colorado tent colony with 6 machine guns then burned it .... Children ranging from several week old babes to boy 11 who ran to get drink for mother who was ill in cellar. He was shot through head. Officials believe at least 20 more women and children have been murdered .... about 200 have been accounted for, 200 missing”(13). After the incident at Ludlow the situation deteriorated into open warfare, forcing Governor E.M.Ammons to wire Wilson, “conditions in this state compel me to request of you that federal troops be sent immediately .... disorder beyond the ability of the local authorities to control”(14). Secretary of War Garrison informed Wilson that he was legally able to act, and was thus able to dispatch federal troops should he so wish, but that “the domestic violence has arisen out of a clash the merits of which you are not concerned with”(15). This forced Wilson to inform Ammons that “my duty, as I now see it,

is to confine myself to maintaining a status of good order until the State can re-assert its authority”(16), he could interfere no further in Colorado affairs. He did, however, informally contact J.D. Rockefeller owner of CFI, to see if he would prevail upon the operators in Colorado to seek a peaceful solution. Rockefeller refused, saying “I have never been personally involved with the CFI company having retired from active business some 15 to 20 years ago”(17). Frank Walsh exposed this lie during CIR hearings in Colorado when he exposed correspondence which showed that Rockefeller was not only actively involved in CFI and Colorado affairs, but had also taken a leading role in the management’s combative stance. Wilson was bitter over Rockefeller’s refusal to help and his double dealing, Colonel House records him speaking “with contempt for mere money getters”(18).

In September President Wilson made another effort to break the deadlock, in a letter to J.P. White the UMW president, he put forward a draft adjustment for a settlement that had been drawn up by H.Davies and W.R. Fairley, commissioners in the Department of Labor’s conciliation section. It included “the enforcement of the mining and labor laws of the state during a three year truce period. All miners not guilty of a violation of the law were to be re-employed. Intimidation was to be prohibited. Scales of pay and rules and regulations were to be clearly posted. Each mine was to appoint a grievance committee. During the truce terms for contractual relations were to be waived. Mine guards were not to be employed. Federal troops were to be removed. There was to be a prohibition on picketing or any other demonstration by labor organizations. There was to be no suspension of work, and a commission was to be set up with presidential appointees, who were to be the final arbitrators in all disputed matters”(19).

Colonel House recorded the miners’ responses thus, “the miners are at the end of their tether financially and they desire the President to appoint the Mediation Committee in order that they may accept it and end the strike, thus saving their faces. They believe that public opinion will later force the operators to arbitrate .... This news is of the most confidential character because the miners do not wish it known that they are at the end of their resources .... Houston has been in touch with the Rockefellers and they are as eager for a settlement”(20). To help bring matters to a head President Wilson released a statement saying “My plan seems to me to be obviously fair and sensible. The striking miners promptly accepted it, but the operators rejected it. I do not feel I am at liberty to do nothing in the circumstances .... (I have) determined to



appoint the commission contemplated in the plan of temporary settlement, notwithstanding the rejection of the plan by the operators''(21). Seth Low the chairman of the NCF, was appointed to head the commission. The miners called off their strike on 10 December 1914 and accepted the commission, the operators would not do so. By March 1915 Low had effected a solution acceptable to both sides. The miners secured improved conditions broadly in line with their original demands and with those put forward by Wilson's conciliators. On the subject of recognition of the UMW no progress was made. In its place, CFI put forward a plan for a company union. To help further the state legislature passed a workingman's compensation act that put Colorado "in the front ranks of States having good legislation for diminishing accidents among workingmen''(22), this promised much in a state where the legislature had so often been controlled by the operators.

Throughout the strike Wilson backed the Department of Labor wholeheartedly, often in the face of serious criticism from the operators. He also intervened on numerous occasions to put his personal offices at the behest of the conflicting parties. He could do little more in a crisis that was fundamentally a state issue. What the strike does show, however, is that on too many occasions labour could only have its interests and needs addressed when a crisis of national proportion occurred, it was only then that labor could force itself on to the White House agenda.

### The Clayton Act

With the inauguration of Wilson various progressive groups hoped to see their special interests protected by legislation. Sam Gompers was quick to remind Wilson of his obligations towards labour, some of his letters exceeding 20 pages! On 21 December 1912 he told the AFL executive council how "I have presented to Woodrow Wilson our legislation in regard to the bills having passed the House .... Clayton Bill to regulate and limit the issuance of injunctions .... Clayton Bill to provide a jury trial for indirect contempts .... Sulzer Bill for the creation of a Department of Labor. We urged him to do what he could in securing the passage of the bills in the Senate''(23).

It soon became apparent that things were not going to go entirely Gompers' way, in spite of his earlier belief that Wilson would honour his labour pledges. Thus he wrote Wilson that "the newspaper press is undertaking to place you in a position before the public entirely at variance with the contentions of labor... (there is a danger of) your being placed in apparent opposition to labor's contentions"(24).

Gompers' unease had been prompted by one of the first pro-labour measures Wilson had been asked to decide upon, the rider Democratic congressmen had added to the Sundry Civil Appropriations Bill 1913. This rider prevented the Department of Justice from using funds appropriated in the prosecution of unions. Taft had vetoed the bill, calling the rider "class legislation of the most vicious sort"(25). When the same measure was reintroduced in April 1913, Gompers hoped to see it pass as Wilson had intimated to congressional leaders that he would not oppose it. However, as news of his apparent approval leaked out he was deluged by a flood of letters from almost every spokesman of organised capital in the country. Under such pressure Wilson characteristically reacted in one of two ways: either to stubbornly dig in and to defend the measure against all odds or to back down. In this case he weakened and reversed his position, primarily because of the strength and importance of his critics. He was not prepared to go out on a limb to back a radical measure for a group of marginal importance like labour. He thus agreed to sign the bill on 23 June 1913, but at the same time he issued a statement explaining that the rider was merely an expression of congressional opinion and that he would find money in the general funds of the Department of Justice for the prosecution of any group that broke the law.

If he hoped that this explanation would solve his problems then he was wrong. Ex-President Taft commented, "he attempts to retain the support of those who insist upon this special privilege by signing the bill, and at the same time to mitigate the indignation of those who have regarded this as a test of his political character by condemning the rider in a memorandum and excusing his signature"(26). On this first critical test Wilson had done much to worry Gompers and other labour leaders. Gompers now began to wonder just how vigorously Wilson would fight for labour and how far he would go in honouring his election pledges. Gompers was not the only person to be alarmed at just how quickly the early idealism of the New Freedom was

tempered by the harsh realities of power. Wilson quickly modified his programme to accommodate the demands of industry, much to the dismay of more peripheral groups like labour.

In the campaign to secure relief from the injunction threat this episode was merely the first volley. At least Gompers and his colleagues now knew how far they could rely on Wilson, that like most politicians he went whichever way the political wind was blowing, and that if they were to get any help from him they would need to threaten and cajole. It was becoming obvious to labour leaders that Wilson was only prepared to back their programmes when they were ripe for realisation. He was not prepared to attach his name to any goals which might require long and patient cultivation, obviously that method of action did not suit his temperament or leadership style. It appeared that Wilson was willing to throw his weight behind only those interests that shouted the loudest, or in the case of the Colorado miner's strike looked like developing into a situation which could injure him if he remained inactive.

Thus the AFL began to deliberately turn up the pressure, and their action seemed to be paying off as the **New York World** announced that "Wilson agreed with members of the House Judiciary Committee that the demands of the AFL, in part, should be incorporated in the administration's anti-trust program"(27). Gompers was calling for an anti-trust programme which included the Bartlett-Bacon plan which would exempt farmer and labour organisations from the operation of the Sherman Act, in that they would be reclassified as non-profit making organisations, and so be free of its effects. Wilson was under such pressure from all sides that he soon "appeared hazy concerning the exact form in which the bills would be rewritten"(27).

Wilson's anti-trust programme, including the labour clauses, was eventually incorporated into three bills drawn up by Henry Clayton of the House Judiciary Committee, which were soon combined into one measure known as the Clayton Bill. The bill had critics in all corners. The most serious area of controversy, however, was when labour leaders and their allies in Congress found nothing in it which gave unions the kind of exemption they requested, and felt they had been promised. They were soon up in arms, threatening the Democrats with the loss of the labour vote unless their demands were met. Knowing that Gompers could not honour any pledge to swing the labour vote one way or the other, Wilson was not unduly worried by this

threat. Still the **New York World** headlined how the unions “Threaten Wilson Unless He Agrees To Exempt Labor,” and reported how “open warfare between the administration, led by President Wilson, and the AFL, led by Samuel Gompers and organized labor’s representatives in Congress is imminent .... The President has been threatened with this feud because he will not agree to an amendment to the anti-trust laws to exempt labor. The threat of open warfare was made today during a conference between the President and a delegation of organized labor’s spokesmen in Congress.” The delegation had declared that “pending measures did not go far enough .... They demanded that labor be taken out entirely .... This demand was not granted, the President informed the representatives he would agree to nothing more than is already provided in the bills. He flatly rejected the demands .... He is of the opinion that organized labor wants the Administration to sanction legislation which would not stand the test of constitutionality”(28). He would concede nothing more than a compromise amendment providing for jury trials in cases of criminal contempt, thus circumscribing the issuance of injunctions in labour disputes, and declaring that unions should not be considered as illegal combinations in restraint of trade when they lawfully sought to obtain legitimate objectives. This did not satisfy labour, it went so far as to threaten to join the Republicans and wreck the whole anti-trust programme if its demand for complete immunity was not granted. Even though he had agreed to this in 1912 he would not budge now, knowing as he did that the forces opposed to labour’s requests were of greater strength and importance.

Wilson’s will prevailed, and so with the compromise labour provision included the House passed the Clayton Bill on 5 June 1914. Two sections of the bill addressed labour: the first section defined organisations working only for mutual aid, and outlined how the law could not be used against them. The second section prevented the federal courts from issuing injunctions to stop workers engaged in a variety of work related protest and activism. The whole section was peppered with qualifying “lawfuls” and in itself said nothing about the legality of the named conduct, it merely addressed the court’s power to issue injunctions. It was almost as if Wilson lost interest in the measure once it left the House, for it was largely cut adrift in the Senate, and as a result was assaulted on many fronts. Many of the Senators debating the bill merely restated the slogans of Gompers or the AABA, without attempting to independently examine the issues raised. One senator denounced the act for being “unjust and pathetic” and spoke vigorously against “special privilege”(29). This obliged labour to combine more closely with farmers’ organisations to try and claw back in the Senate the concessions Wilson and the House had denied them.

On 30 July 1914 Gompers and Frank Morrison the AFL Secretary-Treasurer, the legislative representatives of the Brotherhoods and various national farming interests, addressed an appeal to the Senate Judiciary Committee. The letter reviewed the labour provisions of the bill as it had passed the House, and then went on to specify the changes they felt were necessary to satisfy farmer-labour needs. The changes Gompers argued for would have given labour the total immunity they were seeking, as they would be declared non-profit making organisations and so be outside the scope of the bill. Gompers hoped by excluding labour from the category of "articles of commerce" the act would immunise labour from proceedings under the Sherman Act by putting it beyond the commerce power of the federal government. The Senate stood firm against these demands, making only a few changes of note. Senator Albert Cummins of Iowa, who agreed with Gompers that unions differed from business organisations and should be treated differently, still rejected Gompers' conclusion that the non-violent exercise of union power should never be subject to state regulation or legal liability, and tabled many amendments. His colleagues rejected most of his ideas, but accepted his amendment reading "the labor of a human being is not a commodity or article of commerce"(30).

This famous phrase was, however, no more than a pious expression of senatorial opinion, and in no real way changed labor's standing before the law. That the labour provisions of the bill did not grant immunity from prosecution under the amended Sherman Act was the opinion of practically every contemporary observer. The AABA claimed that no federal court had ever declared the mere existence of a union to be an unlawful restraint of trade, they claimed that Gompers had misled the House Judiciary Committee on this point and charged him "with his usual inaccuracy"(31), and claimed that "without further investigation the Judiciary Committee of both House and Senate took their law from Mr Gompers, and to quiet his apprehension framed this section"(31). The AABA also pointed out that the new act only addressed itself to lawful and peaceful conduct and so in no real way altered the liability of unions under Sherman.

To hide his own embarrassment and disappointment Gompers was obliged to voice all manner of verbal contortions and even called the Clayton Act labour's "Magna Carta". Daniel Davenport speaking for the AABA called this claim "nothing but a humbug and sham," and Taft supported Davenport's claim in a letter to E.E. Witte when he claimed the new act made few changes of but "slight practical importance"(32). In many ways Gompers had no real

choice but to sing the new act's praises. He had spent eight years campaigning for this legislation, ever since the AFL put forward its "Bill of Grievances". The watered down Clayton Act was all he had to show for it, a concession grudgingly granted that did not really meet even his most basic requirements. He realised, however, that to attack the act too harshly would have been folly for it would have played into the hands of those in the AFL who objected to his non-partisan policies. This could well have been fatal, for in 1913 socialists were yet again mounting a concerted effort to unseat him. Gompers and the AFL were thus left to gamble that the organisation could eventually win from the courts what it could not get from Congress. Given the political alignments of the day, and labour's peripheral position, they had in theory little to lose and much to gain, in hoping to get the court to interpret the law in their favour. This was however, a long shot given previous judicial decisions in cases involving labour.

### The Seamen's Act

Another pro-labour measure which had Wilson's seeming approval at the time of his inauguration was the Seamen's bill. Its purpose was to free American seamen from the bondage of their contracts, whilst also strengthening maritime safety requirements. The leader of the Seamen's Union, Andrew Furuseth, had been fighting a largely fruitless battle for presidential and congressional support over twenty years. With the inauguration of Wilson he was confident he would now see his legislative dreams come to fruition. William Wilson, then representative for Pennsylvania, and Senator Robert LaFollette had sponsored Furuseth's bill in the sixty-second Congress. It had passed the House in 1912, and the Senate in 1913, only to receive a veto from Taft in the dying days of his presidency. But with Wilson now in the White House, and his namesake elevated to the Department of Labor, Furuseth felt Taft's veto was only a temporary hitch.

Had the bill been merely a matter of domestic interest it would probably have been re-enacted in the sixty-third congress and signed by Wilson. Trouble arose, however, because the measure abrogated the contractual arrangements of non-Americans serving on foreign registered ships that docked in American ports, thus violating treaties that America had signed with all the leading maritime nations. To complicate matters further, America had agreed to send

representatives to an international conference in London in November 1913 on safety at sea. It hardly seemed like good policy for the government that had taken the initiative in calling the conference to act unilaterally before it had ever met. Thus Wilson yet again found himself in a tricky situation. Before the international ramifications of the bill had been brought fully to his attention he had been willing to support the measure and had actually promised to sign it. Now that the envoys of several of the European powers were expressing objections to Secretary Bryan he pulled back. Furuseth was to find, just as Gompers had over the Clayton bill, that Wilson was really only keen to back those measures that were ripe for realisation, and that he had a strong aversion to controversy. Even though he now had profound misgivings about the implications of the bill he was too late to stop action in the Senate. Sponsored again by LaFollette the measure was passed on 16 October 1913. Wilson did ensure that the House was prevented from moving on it by skilfully blocking any further debate until after the London conference on safety at sea had reported.

After the London conference Wilson found himself in a dilemma: should the United States ratify the convention on safety at sea unconditionally - which would mean dropping Furuseth's bill - or should he have it ratified with a rider leaving room for the passage of the bill? Being the man he was he decided to let the State and Commerce departments make the decision. As they called for the unconditional ratification of the conference findings he was obliged to reverse his position on Furuseth's bill. This resulted in a bitter controversy between Wilson and the progressive leaders in Congress who accused him of acting in bad faith. The House passed a modified version of the bill on 29 August 1914, meanwhile the Senate ratified the convention with a sweeping majority. In March 1915 both houses ratified the conference report, thus it now looked like the bill was doomed.

In an attempt to break the impasse and salvage something Furuseth made a personal appeal to Wilson in which he said "you granted the members of the Executive Council of the AFL (a meeting in which) you renewed your expressions of sympathy but expressed some apprehension with reference to some possible complications that might arise over one section of the bill." Furuseth still believed that "it is difficult for us seamen ... to understand how any nation can justly make any complaint because the United States chooses to make a seaman free"(33). Wilson was obviously touched as the following day he replied giving Furuseth a frank account of his position, "what is troubling me just at this moment is that it demands of the government

what seems a truly impossible thing, namely, the denunciation of some 22 commercial treaties ... I am advised by the State Department that the denunciation of a particular clause of a treaty is not feasible, that to denounce any of it would be to denounce all of it''(34).

Following straight on the heels of the letter Furuseth, La Follette and Senator Owen visited Bryan. This prompted the Secretary of State to immediately wire Wilson on a possible compromise solution that would involve the proponents of the bill having to make the necessary amendments themselves to water down the bill's international dimension. If they could not do so then Wilson would be in a position to veto it whilst apparently acting in good faith. LaFollette added his voice to the debate when he reminded Wilson that he agreed to Bryan's terms and that if any difficulties occurred, "you have twelve months thereafter in which to adjust differences with foreign nations .... Should you require additional time to adjust all differences with the nations concerned I will pledge myself to aid to the uttermost in passing a joint resolution''(35). Seeing how things were developing Wilson astutely realised how little was now required of him, and so he surrendered to the pressure signing the bill on 4 March 1914, but not before he alleged "I debated the matter of signing the bill very earnestly indeed, weighing the arguments on both sides with a great deal of anxiety''(36).

Any analysis of Wilson's behaviour, as regards the backing of pro-labour measures prior to the mid-term elections of 1914, almost invariably obliges one to conclude that any concessions he made to progressive concepts were made only under duress, and consequently were not the result of any genuine conviction on his part. That this suspicion is well founded was shown time and again by the way in which he either refused to back the fulfilment of a large part of the progressive platform or actually obstructed it. He manoeuvred very carefully on the question of the application of the Sherman Act to unions, and did likewise with the Seamen's Act; this was replicated elsewhere. Those concerned with the injunction issue and seamen's rights did get a measure of redress, but elsewhere Wilson successfully stood off the movements designed to swing the influence and financial support of the federal government behind unions in their struggle for advancement.



### Labour Failures Up To 1914

In 1912 whilst campaigning for the presidency Wilson had promised the National Child Labor Committee that he would support measures to prevent the invidious use of minors under fourteen years, and to improve the working conditions and pay of those under eighteen years. Once a measure reached Congress, however, and Wilson heard the infuriated growls of southern Democrats who claimed that such legislation could destabilise the southern economy, he thought again. He skilfully gave the constitution a narrow reading to shelve the bill sponsored by Owen and Keating, insisting along with the bill's other critics, that it represented unconstitutional invasion of the police powers of the states, and that consequently he was unable to back their bill calling for the "forbidding of the shipment in interstate commerce of goods manufactured in whole or in part by children under fourteen, of products of mines and quarries involving the labor of children under sixteen, and of any products manufactured by children under sixteen employed more than eight hours a day"(37). Whilst he was able to escape further hostile comment upon this measure before the 1914 mid-term elections, it did come back to haunt him before his first term was over, when he was called upon to question his reliance on his party's conservative members, and had to contemplate a working arrangement with more liberal and progressive forces.

Wilson likewise drew criticism for his actions on the issue of immigration control. The device favoured by the restrictionists and exclusionists was the literacy test, embodied in the Burnett general immigration bill. The House approved the measure on 4 February 1914, the Senate on 2 January 1915. Wilson came under intense pressure from both sides - from labour/progressive elements favouring restriction, and from employers of foreign labour and the spokesmen of immigrant groups calling for its rejection. Charles Eliot was typical of the latter, writing "I hope very much that you will veto the Burnett bill. The literacy test in the bill is a restrictive measure, it affords no real test .... The supreme selfishness of the attitude of the labor leaders on immigration ought to put them out of court altogether. Many of them are recent immigrants themselves"(38). It did indeed stick in many people's throats that Gompers and many of his officers were foreign born.

On 22 January 1915 Wilson called a meeting in the East Room of the White House to help decide how best to proceed. The meeting lasted two and a half hours, and was evenly divided between both sides. Frank Morrison, AFL Secretary-Treasurer, led those favouring the bill. On the very morning of the meeting Wilson replied to Eliot “(I) must keep my mind open on both sides, but my present judgement is with yours” (39). Thus before he even entered the East Room Wilson’s mind was made up. It came as no surprise to the better informed to hear Wilson return the bill to the House saying, “It is with unaffected regret that I find myself constrained by clear conviction to return this bill without my signature ... the bill represents a radical departure from the traditional and long established policy of this country .... The literacy test and the tests which it constitutes are an even more radical policy” (40).

The supporters of the bill were obviously dismayed, but it was becoming apparent by then that the European War was choking off most of the immigration they feared. It is possible that Wilson had indeed undergone a complete *volte-face* and now genuinely repudiated his earlier words on certain immigrants. His reluctance to support progressive measures once in office would tend to support this. What is harder to explain is why after the mid-term elections when he became noticeably more radical in his actions he still would not endorse restriction. An explanation for this is multi-faceted. The drastic change the literacy test presented to long established American immigration policies would no doubt have deeply offended the traditionalist in Wilson. Here was not a man who wished to back any measure which was a “radical departure from the traditional and long established policy of this country” (40). Also Wilson was astute enough to realise that the acceptance of portions of the AFL’s labour platform requirements, combined with a block on immigration control, could secure the best of all worlds for him. Acting in this way he could hope to gain large quantities of both the labour and immigrant votes during his re-election campaign.

### The End Of The Reform Period And The Mid-Term Elections

A severe world-wide depression began in 1913 with the tightening of credit after the Balkan Wars. Fear of further conflict in Europe kept the markets jittery. When fighting actually began in 1914 it occurred during a period of general economic disorganisation. Unease in the American business world was not diminished by having a Democratic administration

advocating tariff, banking and anti-trust reforms. Their fears were ungrounded for "once in office Wilson, like many successful candidates, began to modify his idealism when faced with the practicalities of responsibility"(41). As Urofsky perceptively declares, the business world soon discovered that "despite the campaign oratory, Wilson and his supporters were not irrational idealists. They understood that there were practical limits on the application of the New Freedom, limits which Wilson the candidate could ignore, but Wilson the President could not"(42). Thus well before mid-1914 the idealistic rhetoric of the New Freedom had been sharply tempered by the realities of power. The Democrats soon modified their programmes to accommodate business needs. Clearly, the 1913 depression made it necessary for Wilson to attempt a reconciliation with business.

Whereas A.S.Link believes political expediency alone made Wilson abandon the New Freedom, Urofsky in rejecting the single cause theory puts forward a more credible alternative. He argues that a variety of elements were at work - the need to soften the blow of the depression, political expediency and the dislocations caused by war in Europe (43). Thus in the spring of 1914 Wilson embarked upon a campaign designed to win the friendship of bankers and businessmen, and to reduce any residual tensions that might exist between the business community and his administration. The accommodation of the anti-trust programme to the needs of business was the first step. His refusal to grant labour anything like the total immunity they sought calmed many business worries about his intentions.

Wilson's courtship of business interests combined with his block on many labour orientated, progressive measures was not lost on the more liberal of voters. By 1914 many progressives had ample reason to doubt his political sincerity. For his own part, Wilson was convinced that he had honoured the platform commitments of the New Freedom in all major departments, including labour pledges. This complacency was soon undermined when the mid-term election results came in. The Republicans could not wage a particularly vigorous campaign, the continuing rupture in their ranks weakened them still. Roosevelt and the Progressive party made one last, unsuccessful, effort to break the mould and establish themselves on a major scale. Yet in spite of these electoral assets the Democrats still made a poor showing in both Senate and Congressional elections; so bad in fact that many believed their defeat in 1916

looked certain. The Democratic majority in the House fell from 73 to 25, while the voting situation in the Senate remained largely unchanged. The Republicans also took back a number of states previously captured by the Democrats, including Wilson's New Jersey.

### The Progressive Reborn

The electoral setback troubled Wilson, not only did it throw the issue of his re-election into doubt, but it also contradicted his belief that his programme to carry out a major re-organisation of American economic life was complete and that the progressive movement had fulfilled its mission. Yet clearly the voters found the Democratic performance lacklustre. This initially nonplussed Wilson. He had not taken office promising to carry out a progressive programme of federal social reform. He had merely promised to lower the tariff, re-organise the currency and banking systems, and strengthen the anti-trust law. He had actually done all of these things, and so was shocked by public ingratitude. Yet all of these reforms were achieved with the minimum of concession to advanced progressive concepts, and it was these people who were becoming reluctant to continue to support the Democrats. So just as Wilson had been beginning to congratulate himself on a job well done he was faced with an election result that called his whole performance into question. Not only had he to begin again but he was also obliged to act in a more overtly progressive manner if he was to have any real hope of electoral success in 1916. If the election results of 1914 proved anything it was that his campaign to win over large sections of the business community had been unsuccessful, and that many previously loyal progressive voters were now also beginning to doubt him.

Commenting upon his problems, Frederick Howe suggested "I feel that the Democratic party should fall heir to the group of socially minded membership of the Progressive party"(44), and put forward a plan calling for the extension of social insurance to cover accidents, sickness, unemployment and old age; the development of insurance and pension systems for federal employees; the construction of "wandering artisan" homes; and the setting up of a nationwide system of employment agencies. By writing as he did Howe was hoping that Wilson would make a play for the heart of the progressive movement. Wilson was clearly interested as in his Jackson Day address he announced "only the Democratic party has carried out policies which the progressive people of this country have desired .... Don't you think it would be a

pretty good idea for the Democratic party to undertake a systematic method of helping the workingman of America? There is a very simple way in which they could help the workingman. If we were simply to establish a great federal employment bureau .... It was suggested in a cabinet meeting that the Department of Labor should have printed information about this in such a form that it can be pasted up in the post offices all over the United States''(45). Following on from this speech William Wilson was allowed to move cautiously ahead on this plank of the Howe plan.

Henry Seager, another leading progressive, followed the Howe line when saying, ''(I) venture to hope that you will include among the subjects touched upon in your message to Congress the need for a more adequate compensation law for federal employees. The defects in the present law are universally conceded .... federal employees are not able to have recourse to damage suits against their employer .... Last Winter the Kern-McGillicuddy bill supported by this association (The American Association for Labor Legislation), was reported favorably to the Judiciary Committee of the House. Pressures from public business prevented it from coming to a vote .... The increasing pressure of public business which prevented legislation last Winter is the only serious obstacle in the way of definite action''(46). Ralph Meeker followed up claiming ''I feel that the compensation legislation in the United States is needlessly backward .... European countries are far in advance of us in respect to social insurance, and this is one of the reasons that their people are more united than our own. We should come out boldly and emphatically for a national insurance act similar to the Health Insurance Act of Great Britain''(47).

Progressive measures that had been previously rejected outright or discouraged now had the Wilson administration's support. Having earlier refused to support the rural credits bill, a measure designed to aid the smaller debt ridden farmer, Wilson now reversed his position and helped the bill become law. The log-jam that had seen too many progressive bills frustrated was now broken. The Kern-McGillicuddy workingman's compensation bill and the Keating-Owens child labor bill were both now given a new lease of life. Wilson's keenness to support the child labour measure was no doubt linked to the prompting of people like Secretary Daniels: ''the Republicans warmly favor the child labor act but (claim) that the Democrats were opposing it. In view of the closeness of the vote in many states, and that women will vote in a large number of states I feel it would be a grave mistake if the Senate does not pass the child

labor bill .... I know many southern Senators oppose it but I believe that the failure to pass the bill will lose us more votes in the close states than our southern Senators appreciate''(48). Wilson had previously bowed to southern senatorial pressure, now he was forced to confront them. He was no doubt acting more out of fear that the Republicans would steal the credit for the bill than out of any real belief in the measure. On 18 July 1916 the president thus made an unannounced visit to the Capitol buildings, and there conferred with the Democratic majority leader Kern and other leading Democrats on the appropriate steering committees. He wished to fully rescue the 1912 Democratic party pledges, and so was obliged to press for the passage of the child labor measure and the bill calling for compensation payments to be made to injured federal employees. Under such pressure the senators wilted and agreed to back Wilson. On 25 July 1916 the Senate passed the bill on child labour.

One can only wonder how they would have reacted had Wilson had the courage to pressurize them in a similar way before the mid-term elections. Perhaps like Wilson they too were only galvanised into action by the possibility of a Democratic defeat in 1916. Following on its heels the AALL model workingmans' compensation bill for federal employees was passed on 19 August 1916. As with the earlier bill on child labour its resurrection owed much to Wilson's new found desire to be seen as a progressive.

The reason for this astonishing metamorphosis in Democratic policies, coming as it did in the summer of 1916, was apparent to all observers. But regardless of the motivation behind Wilson's new commitment to advanced doctrines, the fact is that the Democratic congressional majority - with Wilson pushing hard - had by Autumn 1916 enacted almost every important plank of the Democratic and Progressive party platforms of 1912. Progressivism had come momentarily to fruition and had found acceptance by one of the major parties. Clearly Wilson saw no contradiction when he announced in 1916 that he had carried out not only his own election promises of 1912, but those of Roosevelt as well. He knew only too well that he had been elected by less than a majority in 1912 and that he would need the votes of as many progressives as possible in 1916 now that the Republicans had reunited. It is thus highly unlikely that anything more concrete than political expediency dictated Wilson's shift, as Secretary Garrison said, 'I once heard a description which as nearly fits the case of President Wilson as any other I know, in describing someone it was said, 'He was a man of high ideals, but no principles'''(49).

## Trouble On The Railroads

The smooth run up to the 1916 presidential election was seriously affected by trouble on the railways requiring from Wilson a crucial piece of crisis management. A nationwide rail strike would seriously affect the preparedness programme, cause nationwide distress and paralyse industry.

Trouble on the railways had been long brewing. Matters came to a head on 9 March 1916 when the presidents of the four brotherhoods presented demands for an eight hour day, with no accompanying reduction in wages from the ten hours they normally worked, and time and a half pay for all overtime work. On 15 June the management rejected the demands, offering to submit them to arbitration. Wilson had been alerted to the situation by Senator Adamson who felt that "it looks like danger is brewing in the railroad situation. We are casting about to find some way to avert the universal strike which seems imminent .... We would like to have the benefit of any suggestions you might make"(50).

Wilson decided to invite both sides to a personal conference. This did not please W.C.Chambers of the Board of Mediation and Conciliation, who was forced to write, "I observe that the representatives of the railroads are to have a conference with you either today or tomorrow .... you are to be asked to bring about an adjustment of the wage dispute ... neither of the parties to the controversy has yet applied to the Board of Mediation and Conciliation for its services, as provided by the Act of Congress 13 July 1913. Neither has a condition yet been reached in the controversy 'in which an interruption of traffic is imminent and fraught with serious detriment to the public interest' which would otherwise allow the Board to 'proffer its services' .... I deem it my duty to suggest that if you should be asked to intervene at this stage it would be well to refer the parties to the past efficiency of the law"(51). Already officials in the Department of Labor were worried that the president would decide to intervene personally, bypassing their expert services, and so diminishing their ability to act in future disputes. They felt that any intervention he made at this stage would be taken by capital and labour as meaning he had little faith in their abilities to act in time of crisis. While Chambers was urging caution and an adherence to the law, Wilson seemed to be preparing to act more decisively. On 31 July he sent William Wilson a letter he had received from H.A.Wheeler, president of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and asked for Secretary Wilson's comments. Wheeler had alleged that

“conviction is deepened that an amicable settlement is remote .... On 18 August the Joint Conference will convene again, the men will announce the result of their strike vote. The Board of Mediation and Conciliation may come into the matter then, but without effect, in my judgement, in bringing these contending factions together”(52).

William Wilson did not agree with Wheeler for he advised “I still believe there is a lot of hysteria about the situation growing out of the fact that a strike vote has to be taken before the railroad companies and the Mediation Board will recognize that a labor dispute exists .... A strike vote taken under such circumstances does not reflect the attitude of the workmen towards a strike but represents the desire to press their claims to the front when the Mediation Board is called in. Neither does the stand taken by either side at the beginning of the negotiations always represent what they will be willing to accept at the end .... In my judgement it would not be wise to provide any special machinery for the adjustment of this dispute .... Within three years we have created a new Mediation Board. It has done splendid work. There is no indication that it is not capable of handling this situation”(53).

Thus William Wilson backed Chambers and his other Department of Labor officials, and advised the president not to intervene personally, but to leave things to his officers and let the law smoothly run its course. Unfortunately when it was called in the Mediation Board was unable to bring about a settlement, and 94% of the 400,000 Brotherhood members approved strike action. Thus Wilson stepped in and on the morning of 13 August conferred with over 30 rail union officers at the White House. Brotherhood President Garretson made it abundantly clear that the eight hour claim was non-negotiable, and was seemingly unmoved by Wilson’s words that a strike would have catastrophic consequences for the country. Wilson met the owners during the afternoon. They were equally unbending, and claimed that the union demands would cost them an extra \$100,000,000 a year.



The following morning both sides again presented their cases to Wilson, while he again renewed his call for compromise. When both sides refused to back down he resolved to try and impose a settlement of his own. On 16 August he put forward a plan calling for the concession of the eight hour day, the postponement of the overtime demand and the setting up of a commission to observe and report on conditions in the industry (54).

On 18 August he met 31 rail union officers in the Green Room and pleaded with them to accept his plan, threatening that refusal could lead to nationalisation. The owners were called back in the next day, they highlighted how they felt his plan would destroy all the previous peaceful moves for labour adjustment in the industry. They were certain that federal intervention would destroy the existing arbitration system, which they hoped he would endorse. This caught Wilson in an embarrassing position: the owners welcomed mediation and arbitration - clearly hoping it would lead to a toning down of labour's demands. The unions, however, were demanding pre-conditions before talks could begin, namely the granting of the eight hour day. Wilson now had to decide what to do in a situation that threatened the nation's economic well-being when one side was refusing arbitration. Wilson decided to browbeat the management. He did promise, however, to use his influence with Congress to increase rates so as to cover the extra costs the changes would involve. When it still remained clear that the owners would not move he declared, "if a strike comes, the public will know where the responsibility rests. It will not be upon me" (55). Clearly though he could not leave matters there, he again called in the owners, but his pleading was to no avail.

There were indications that some owners actually welcomed a strike, believing they could use it to crush the Brotherhoods. Ripley, the owner of the Santa Fe network, felt he could break the unions in thirty days. H.G.Otis the **Los Angeles Times** correspondent felt that "organized railroad men would be the losers by tremendous majority, and the outcome would be the ultimate non-unionizing of the railroad service" (56). Wilson's bitterness towards the owners was such that he declared "I pray God to forgive you, I never can" (57), as he parted company with them. On 27 August the Brotherhoods let it be known that their strike would begin on 4 September.

Wilson was in conference with the Senate Democratic leaders during the afternoon of 28 August working on emergency legislation. Before a joint session of Congress the next day he outlined legislation designed to prevent the strike, and also to guarantee that such a catastrophe could never happen again. During a long speech in which he outlined the history of the dispute and his part in preventing it, he came up with the following peace proposals: "1) An eight hour day for railworkers engaged in interstate commerce (which in the absence of positive overtime meant ten hours' pay for eight hours work). 2) Compulsory suspension of rail strikes pending investigation by a federal commission. 3) That the Interstate Commerce Commission study the costs of the eight hour day, with a view to allowing the rail owners to increase rates. 4) That the president be authorised to compel rail workers and officials to operate trains for military purposes" (58).

His endorsement of the eight hour day, long a union demand, was of vital importance in rallying labour to him during the Autumn campaign. The next few days were busy, for it appeared at first that Congress might refuse to act. With the help of W.C. Adamson, Chairman of the House Interstate Commerce Committee, and Majority Leader Kitchin, Wilson pushed his opponents into line. Kitchin and Adamson drafted a bill imposing the eight hour day, which would take effect on 1 January 1917, and also providing for a commission to study rail problems. Wilson and other congressional leaders were first shown the bill on 31 August. The following day it was introduced into the House and approved by 239 votes to 56. After a day of acrimonious debate, and much browbeating, the Senate accepted the bill on 2 September, Wilson signing it the same day. Passage of the Adamson Act forestalled the strike set to begin on 4 September. The owners refused to accept the bill, and immediately began proceedings to challenge its constitutionality. They refused to recognize its legality when it came into effect on 1 January 1917, so the Brotherhoods again renewed their strike call for 15 March 1917. Under pressure from Wilson the strike was lifted for forty eight hours on 17 March, during which time U boats sank American shipping. As war seemed imminent the owners conceded their case and accepted the new act. On 19 March the Supreme Court voting 5 to 4 declared the act valid.

Wilson's intervention, primarily on the side of labour, won him many plaudits from union activists and was of great value to him during his re-election campaign. The browbeating of Congress and the enactment of the Adamson Act did, however, help the Republicans somewhat during the same campaign. The averting of the threatened rail strike was Wilson's second

major piece of crisis management during a labour dispute. The breakdown in industrial relations in the rail industry did have a truly federal dimension, something which the Colorado miners' strike never had, and so allowed Wilson the chance to step decisively in when he wished and to enact emergency legislation.

### The IWW

The activities of the IWW were causing unease to the governments of the Western territories. In October 1915 Secretary Lane received a telegram from the governors of California, Utah, Washington and Oregon saying they were experiencing "abnormal disorder" and asking him to launch a federal investigation on the grounds of an "indication of an interstate conspiracy and misuse of mails" (59). This was not the first such request he had received, so Lane and Secretary Gregory thought it best to discuss the matter with Wilson, and it was he who gave permission for the inquiry to go ahead. Gregory contacted Wilson in February 1916 with its findings: "the investigations have shown that the membership of the Industrial Workers of the World is made up for the greater part of agitators, men without homes, mostly foreigners, the discontented and unemployed who are not anxious to work, and men of a very lower order of intelligence and morals .... The membership numbers about 2,000 in each of the states of California and Washington. The movement in Utah and Oregon is receding. The leaders of the Industrial Workers of the World preach 'direct action' and 'sabotage' .... It (the enquiry) failed to develop any evidence of violations of the federal statutes except in the mailing of certain publications and the writing of obscene and incendiary letters" (60).

Federal officials were keen to move against radicalism but simply lacked the tools to do so before the war. Whether the IWW deserved its reputation is beside the point, for the federal government saw internal security, and all threats to it, largely in terms of that organisation. The western appeal for aid in 1915 was simply one of many coming from those territories between 1912 and 1915, all of which failed to provide any real concrete evidence of offences against federal laws. In 1912 a scrupulously thorough examination by Justice officials in California had failed to produce any evidence to indict IWW leaders for conspiracy, but although no persecution was possible it did not stop the flood of state demands to Washington for help. As William Preston notes, "until World War One Washington was embarrassed by the lack of

laws suitable for the prosecution of dissident members of the community''(61). Lacking the tools and emergency conditions that could justify federal action, the government could only sit back and wait. While the calls for help did not change, the circumstances certainly did; American entry into the war, revolutionary disorder in Europe and unrest in America all created a justification for war-time repression.

Official worries over the IWW were redoubled in 1915 when the organisation began a new period of rejuvenation. In that year the Agricultural Workers Organization (AWO) was put together and given a charter. The AWO was firmly anchored in the mid-western wheat belt, and was the foundation for other significant membership gains made in 1917 in the western metal producing areas. With the formation of the AWO, the IWW began to show signs of concentration on more stable unionism for the first time in its short life. By August 1916 the IWW had issued 116 charters, and had sufficient money for the first time ever to pay salaries to its officers. By 1917 the IWW had 100,000 members, compared to 18,000 during the Lawrence strike and 40,000 in 1916. These developments have led Philip Taft to conclude that the IWW ''was functioning regularly as a labor organization ... able to sink roots in some of the industries employing a large complement of unskilled labor''(62). Consequently, as Robert Goldstein wrote, ''had not the government smashed the IWW during and after the war there is good reason to believe that it might have become a powerful economic organization of unskilled and semi-skilled labor''(63).

Evidence of IWW activities and revival worried Wilson, especially so when American entry into the war in Europe was becoming increasingly likely. The president was also receiving reports on the activities of foreign agents working in America for the countries engaged in the European War and was worried in case the IWW might be drawn into these intrigues. In September 1915 Secretary Lansing sent Wilson a confidential intercept of a communication between the Austrian ambassador and his Foreign Minister in Vienna. The intercept concerned itself ''with regard for arrangements for a strike in the steel and munitions factory at Bethlehem (Schwabs) and in the middle West''(64). Ambassador Dumba was already actively organising German language newspapers, organising unions of Austro-Hungarian workmen and forming separate labour bureaux for his own countrymen. Wilson insisted that the Central Powers recall Dumba and his co-conspirators Boy-Ed and Van Papen, the German military and naval attaches.

Wilson had the IWW proscribed during his second term and had emergency war time legislation passed which allowed federal agents for the first time to arrest its officers and members.

### **The 1916 Presidential Campaign and Election**

Wilson was inundated with suggestions for the Democratic platform for the coming election. By June the following labour programme had been bolted together, “1) A living wage for all employees. 2) A working day not to exceed eight hours, with one day of rest in seven. 3) The adoption of safety appliances and the establishment of thoroughly sanitary conditions of labor. 4) Adequate compensation for industrial accidents. 5) The standards of the ‘Uniform Child Labor Law’ whenever minors are employed. 6) Such provisions for decency, comfort and health in the employment of women as should be accorded the mothers of the race. 7) Adequate provision for aged employees entitled to retirement by long and faithful service. We believe also that the adoption of similar principles SHOULD BE URGED AND APPLIED in the legislation of the states with regard to labor within their borders”(65).

Wilson hoped that this platform would win him not only the votes of workingmen, but also those of the progressives who were without a party now that the Republicans had reunited. Charles Crane told him how “the Progressives are in a resentful mood and will probably drift in large numbers towards us without propaganda, (but) any sympathetic moves at St. Lewis would be most effective”(66). Norman Hapgood felt “several hundred thousand - perhaps a million - Progressives who are displeased with the failure of the Colonel to run, and who think Hughes too conservative”(67) would vote for Wilson. However, in a letter to Hapgood W.A. White noted a view prevailing among many, “the truth is that I see no very great reason why he (Wilson) should be defeated; and - woe is me - no considerable preponderance of evidence in favor of his election ... perhaps 35% of the Progressives who had remained loyal to their party through the election of 1914 would vote for Woodrow Wilson in 1916”(68).

In an under-heated campaign things seemed to be going Wilson's way. His Republican opponent C.E.Hughes, who was the leader of the progressive wing of his own party, fought a lacklustre campaign. He had difficulty finding an issue with which to attack Wilson and to energise his own supporters. He had his greatest success though when attacking Wilson on his handling of the rail strike and on the issue of the eight hour day. So telling was his criticism, and so vital had labour become to Wilson's success, that his advisors urged him to concentrate on this issue. Colonel House wrote him urging him to point out that "1) The labor leaders did not hold up the President and Congress in order to get legislation which the President proposed for they preferred to accomplish their purposes through strike. 2) Hughes had no suggestion or criticism to make at the time. 3) If Hughes had disagreed with the President's action, what would he have done in the circumstances? 4) Many of the railroad managers favored accepting the President's proposal because they thought the strike would be successful. 5) If the people will sustain the President he will urge upon Congress legislation that will take the menace of the strike from us"(69).

Others also wrote Wilson urging him to speak out on the eight hour day. Not only did he do so, but characteristically he followed the House line. It was important he address the issue, for as House noted "I told him that while the logic of the situation was with us, the vote would certainly not be unless the drift (which) had set in against us because of the eight hour law was stopped"(70). Another old friend, Charles Eliot - no lover of labour - took a different line, "the reason I hear given by reasonable people for abandoning you in favor of Hughes is that you cannot be trusted to deal justly and courageously with the industrial warfare which will probably become fierce within the next four years; that you do not see how selfish and greedy the unions are, or how ruthless they can be in enforcing their demands for more pay, and that you are afraid to use the powers of the government to prevent strikes in public utilities .... They are dissatisfied with what you did about the threats of the railroad brotherhoods and believe (without evidence) that Hughes would have done better .... I believe that there is no clear choice between the Democratic and Republican parties in regard to timidity before the labor organizations"(71). Wilson ignored Eliot's advice and adhered to the House line, for as the Colonel said, "it is true we have organized wealth against us, and in such an aggregate as never before. On the other hand, we are pitting organized labor against it, and the fight is not an unfair one"(72).

He was rewarded for his post-1914 championing of labour causes with the clear unequivocal support of the AFL hierarchy. Sam Gompers called out the troops for him and the movement abandoned the sham of neutrality they had employed in earlier elections. The left wing of the progressive movement, including many socialists, seemed never to doubt for one moment that they had no real alternative but to back Wilson. Virtually the entire leadership of the advanced progressives moved *en masse* into the Wilson camp. The Wilsonian strategy of building up a new coalition of progressives and unionists worked magnificently. The Brotherhoods, the AFL and other small groups of labour all supported him. Even such IWW stalwarts as Mother Jones went on the stump for Wilson, although the IWW as a movement did not support him. So vigorous was labour's support that Hughes was obliged to drop the eight hour issue. Sam Gompers issued a ringing declaration of support, "Never at any time in the last fifty years have the workers had more at stake in any political campaign .... During the present administration the organized labor movement has been able to secure recognition for the rights of human beings and opportunity for all to participate in the affairs of the nation in a degree that has never before been accomplished .... This recognition has taken the form of legislation necessary to protect the interests of wage earners. During the last four years there has been enacted by Congress and signed by President Wilson humanitarian protective legislation unprecedented in amount and scope"(73). Gompers was indeed quite right to say that Wilson had been at the helm when legislative changes were made, but ignored the fact that much of this legislation was of poor quality, was only grudgingly conceded, was not really what labour desired, or was done solely to curry favour. Wilson's task was made easier by the fact that the leaders of the AFL desired so very little from the government, and were so anxious for recognition and respectability that they would praise almost any change.

It is clear that the campaign witnessed an almost perfect alignment of progressives and conservatives into opposing camps. The factor which won Wilson his second term was the fusion of the peace cause, caught so perfectly by the slogan "He Kept Us Out of the War," with the pledge of a move towards greater progressive democracy - a programme Hughes could not match. The labour measures of his first term proved to be an essential part of his election campaign strategy and in the formation of his electoral base and coalition. His promise to keep America out of the war was not in itself enough to cement this new progressive-labour coalition, that was only achieved by his promise of progressive democracy. The bombastic, pro-war utterances of Roosevelt clearly hurt Hughes, but never as much as his own inability to seize the political initiative.

To many people's surprise the early returns on 7 November seemed to give Hughes an almost clean sweep of the Eastern states. For a time it looked as if Wilson had fluffed things and actually lost the election. As the night progressed, however, and one after another of the Western states fell in behind the Democrats, it became clear he had done enough to hold onto office. Gompers publically campaigned for the Democrats; in the Western states particularly this proved to be of vital importance. By November 1916 the AFL were becoming a core constituent of the Democrats, who as a minority party nationally needed all the friends they could get. The contest was so close though that in some states a handful of votes would have been enough to have elected Hughes. With a total of 277 electoral votes Wilson had a majority of 23 in the Electoral College. In all he received 9,129,606 votes as against 8,538,221 for Hughes, a gain for Wilson of almost three million votes over 1912 - many of them obviously being ex-Roosevelt progressives and socialists. It was the best evidence yet that Wilson's progressive - peace campaign had succeeded in drawing together a new alliance, although still not a majority of the popular vote, something he could not achieve in either of his two election victories. Socialists deserted the SPA to back Wilson, their vote dropping to 585,113 in 1916 from a high of 901,873 in 1912.

All contemporary observers agreed that the key factor behind Wilson's success was his promise of continued peace, prosperity and progressive democracy. These were the issues that won over a large majority of women voters, a large minority of socialists, and a large enough number of progressives to win the day. W.E.Dodd confided to Colonel House that "it is the South and West united; the farmers, small businessmen and perhaps a large sprinkling of Union labor against the large industrial transportation and commercial interests"(74). Wilson actually succeeded in winning most of the agricultural states - something Bryan had narrowly failed to do in 1896. To that he added two Eastern States and a large portion of the social justice vote, who had previously supported Roosevelt. The labour vote, although not yet fully organised, to a large extent heeded Gompers's advice and went to Wilson. It was a crucial factor in his success in New Hampshire, Ohio, Washington and California.

The Senate and Congressional contests were equally close. The Democratic majority in the Senate was reduced to 8, while control of the House lay in the hands of a few progressives and independents, the new Congress consisting of 217 Republicans, 213 Democrats, 2 Progressives, 1 Socialist, 1 Prohibitionist and 1 Independent.



### The Close Of The First Administration

The sixty-third Congress was the longest ever sitting up to that time, and from it the Democrats secured a useful package of measures, many of them of a pro-labour nature. It must be pointed out, however, that many of the measures progressed to fruition with almost no help or positive guidance from the president. Some measure he actually tried to frustrate or stop altogether. The pro-labour clauses in the Clayton Act were only conceded grudgingly and with much backsliding on Wilson's part. The final package was so watered down as to be meaningless. Even before it was declared unconstitutional by the Supreme Court in the early 1920s, all contemporary observers were pointing out that it in no way changed labour's standing before the law, irrespective of Gompers' claims to the contrary. Gompers, of course, had no real option but to sing its praises, he knew it was all Wilson would grant him, and praising it might keep his radical enemies at bay. Being a trained, if unsuccessful, lawyer and a professor of jurisprudence, one wonders how Wilson could have escaped noticing its glaring faults, that is of course assuming he was ever concerned enough to study it. The Seamen's Act was also passed reluctantly. It was, however, an excellent piece of work, but as Wilson played no part in the drafting of it, and actually did much to frustrate it once he became aware of its international dimension, he cannot claim much credit for it. Its passage owes everything to the bravery and persistence of Andrew Furuseth and Robert LaFollette. It was unfortunate that the war wiped out many of the improvements Furuseth was working for.

The passage of other pro-labour measures, such as the Child Labor Law and the Workingman's Compensation Act for Federal employees, owes much to the fact that after the 1914 mid-term elections, with the Republicans reuniting, the Progressives fragmenting and many businessmen remaining aloof from his overtures, Wilson needed to cobble together a progressive alliance if he was to have any real hope of being re-elected in 1916. Prior to the off-year elections he had rejected these bills, but now with necessity staring him in the face he thought again. An editorial in the New Republic described him thus, "Wilson is being motivated by political expediency. From the day of his first nomination, his absorbing preoccupation has been the resurrection of the Democratic party as a capable organ of government. In the pursuit of this objective Wilson has been a thoroughgoing opportunist. Every statesman has to a large extent to be an opportunist, but Wilson's brand of opportunism has not been convincing. His management has been unscrupulously adroit, his opinions have been suspiciously fluid; the reversals and expansions of his policy have been too numerous and too considerable" (75).

It is unfortunate that labour could only get on to the White House agenda when Wilson needed their support or when a crisis of national proportions developed. During periods of emergency labour could force Wilson to activate a programme of crisis management, as he did over conditions in Colorado and during the threatened rail strike. It is during these crises that we see the magic of the man. A man capable of acting decisively when the need arose, a man able to get his way with Congress and force through emergency legislation, as he did with the Adamson Act. It is a pity that this kind of action could only be brought forth infrequently. It is almost as if when people pressed their demands peacefully he could feel free to ignore them if he so wished.

Clearly at the close of the first administration Wilson was well informed on the broad subdivisions within the labour movement. He had come into contact with, spoken to and corresponded with many AFL officials. No doubt he found them pleasing acquaintances. Their desire to be accorded a measure of recognition and respectability would have appealed to his ordered mind and personality. Legislatively they asked for very little, which both pleased him and played into his manipulative hands. The fact that Wilson spoke at the dedication of the new AFL offices in Washington showed the growing significance of this section of the labour movement. This act demonstrated how politicians had now to address themselves to labour whether they really wanted to or not. In many ways the actual words spoken that day by Wilson were meaningless. They were, in fact, simply more vague promises of friendship and support. What was really important was the actual appearance itself- a clear recognition of how far labour, especially in its AFL guise, had come.

The IWW were, however, another matter completely. Here were malcontents attempting to overthrow the social, economic and political systems that had shaped and moulded Wilson. Here were men who Wilson felt were quite prepared to use violence and sabotage. The reports he had reviewed of their activities in the Western territories, when combined with their resurgence in 1915 in areas vital to the economy, all greatly troubled him. This was especially so when he witnessed the European powers' willingness to intervene in American affairs, for he was concerned that the IWW might be drawn into such schemes. Officials within the Department of Justice had already shown that they had no legal justification as yet for moving against the organisation. An opportunity came during the second administration under the emergency conditions engendered by American entry into the European war. As we shall see

in the next chapter the IWW and domestic radicalism were then effectively crushed.

Wilson's first term closed with him returned to office as the head of a new progressive-labour coalition, who had voted for him as he promised to keep America out of the war, and as he had given them the hope of greater progressive democracy at home. Wilson effectively reneged on both promises during his second term and it is that which we will examine in the closing chapter.

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## CHAPTER SIX

### THE SECOND ADMINISTRATION

This chapter will concern itself with how American entry into the European War affected the developing relationship between the federal government and labour. The declaration of war gave the administration the excuse they needed to move against the IWW and SPA. The emergency also made it imperative for the government to more fully involve the AFL in the everyday functioning of the administration. We will see, however, that this new relationship was created for purely short-term reasons, and that in the postwar period the administration speedily withdrew its support from the AFL and aided employers in their drive against labour. By the chapter's close we will see the AFL pushed back to their pre-war bastions and in a structurally weaker position than in 1916, and with none of their "Bill of Grievances" fully rectified.

#### The American Entry Into The European War

Wilson's electoral success in 1916 owed a great deal to his attaching his name to rising progressive sentiment. His decision to take the country into the European War had electoral implications. American progressivism was concentrated largely on economic and social justice at home, almost to the point where it became provincialism. Thus the vast majority of progressives, especially in the Mid-West, wanted to keep America out of the war, and so were in the anti-war, anti-preparedness ranks. There was also almost unanimous opposition from labour and farmer organisations to preparedness and the war, the one notable exception being Sam Gompers.

In 1914 the AFL spoke out against the war, feeling it was a capitalist war which could only weaken labour. Gompers, seeing how European labour was enfeebled by its members' rush to don uniform, decided his own movement must not suffer if a similar situation was ever to occur in America. Seeing how the European movements had acted, he decided that if he were ever placed in a similar situation he would cooperate with the war effort and so not lose his power to influence events in labour's favour. As he said himself, "the present war has proved



that one of the strongest emotions in a man is patriotism. It is stronger than the fundamental tenet of socialism, stronger than the ideals of international peace, stronger than religion, stronger than love of life and family''(1). He was realistic enough to see that American intervention in the war was inevitable, and that in such a situation it would be best to offer one's services freely rather than be coerced into action. By cooperating labour would not only have an opportunity to get their point of view over, but they could also stop employers who might wish to use the war as a pretext for rolling back labour gains. Gompers perceived that American entry into the war would probably force the government to take over the levers of industrial control. Thus as government intervention was unavoidable, it was better he protect AFL interests and so try and turn the emergency to his own advantage.

The AFL made public their new found commitment to the national service by publishing American Labor's Position in Peace or in War, which pledged their support in the fight against Germany. It was not an unconditional pledge. Gompers especially was determined to safeguard his recent advances. He was hoping to make the AFL the medium through which the government would attempt to win the cooperation of all workers, whether unionised or not. Thus he dropped his almost life-long commitment to pacifism and deserted the American peace movement once it became clear it was impractical to remain a pacifist. This ability to desert his principles was what made him such a useful tool to the Wilson administration, and why during the war they rewarded him and other like-minded AFL officers with positions on government boards.

This volte-face was made in the face of strong opposition. Whilst Gompers was being pressurised by his NCF associates, who worked on his narcissism and anti-socialist biases, to preach the rightness of the allied cause, he was under equal pressure from the German-Irish bloc in the AFL to support their countrymen. Clearly the administration was hoping to use Gompers to win these elements for the war, or at worst neutralise them. The Irish were increasingly anti-British after the Easter Rising and gladly joined with their German brethren, thus Gompers was in some danger of splitting the AFL, or at the very least alienating large and powerful sections. He knew that many AFL officers had no wish to ally themselves with the British and French governments, but from his own analysis of events in those countries he knew that if he wished to have any say in national affairs he would have to back the war effort.

Gompers' decision to use the war to best advantage was also influenced by the fact that the unemployment and economic depressions that had hindered the AFL for long periods during the early twentieth century were soon things of the past as war orders flooded in and stimulated the economy. Unemployment had almost disappeared before American intervention in Europe. A labour shortage was made almost acute by the cutting off of European immigration. Good business conditions, rising prices and a buoyant market brought with them calls for higher wages, shorter hours, and improved overtime pay, and opportunities for unionisation. These conditions gave the AFL a potentially strong hand, but one that could be easily lost if war came to America and the government resorted to emergency legislation to compel obedience. The boom certainly gave millions of workers the confidence they needed to quit their jobs or strike for better conditions. Thus the government mobilised for war in the midst of one of the most extensive and long-lasting strike waves in the country's history. The influence of anti-war agitation and unprecedented strike activity prompted the administration to devote special attention to labour.

### **The Suppression Of The IWW And Other Radicals**

American entry into the war gave the Wilson administration two major problems: organising the nation's industrial capacity and winning the support of workers, farmers and dissidents. To accomplish these goals the administration openly conciliated pro-war AFL officers and businessmen, and when this failed with others used the power of the federal government to coerce and crush. Support for the war was decidedly patchy, especially among workers and farmers. This meant that the administration had reason to offer bribes. Anti-war activity was particularly strong in rural areas with many farmers believing that Wilson had betrayed them. Socialism was rife in the Mid-West with the SPA being the only nationally organised group against the war. This gave the party an opportunity to rally anti-war elements to its banners. The Wilson administration met this problem head on by trying to destroy the SPA and the IWW. The situation looked dire as George Creel, the head of the Committee on Public Information (CPI), reported: "You will find in Georgia and parts of South Carolina, you will find in Arkansas; you will find in many parts of the West, an indifference that is turned into a very active irritation that borders on disloyalty .... We must take the whole country"(2).

In 1917 the radical movement in America was made up chiefly of the SPA, the IWW and the Non-Partisan League, a mainly rural based progressive group. The IWW was generating a strong appeal to native-born unskilled workers previously ignored by the AFL. The SPA was showing a strength not seen by earlier socialist parties like the SLP, or even the Populists. Given the strength of radicalism in America at that time it is not surprising that opposition to American entry into the war was huge. Organisations which identified themselves as anti-war made big gains in 1917 despite the opening of a vicious anti-radical campaign against them. The IWW recruited over 30,000 new members between April and September 1917. The SPA also made great gains which were linked to its anti-war stand, growth so impressive that Daniel Bell spoke of them as reaching "new and spectacular heights"(3). This growing anti-war sentiment did not threaten revolution or violence, but it did pose a serious threat of disaffection which if left unchecked could have undermined the nation's morale.

Whilst the SPA remained pacifist in large part, the IWW sought an equivocation that might spare it from government attack. The IWW leadership decided to allow the membership to act upon their own consciences on registration for the draft and conscription. Incredibly registration ran as high as 95% in many areas(4), but then membership of the IWW did not automatically mean disloyalty to America - something the administration never quite realised. The IWW's concentration on industrial action and its toning down of its anti-militaristic, anti-government background did not win it a last minute reprieve. As William Preston said "The effort proved fruitless and irrelevant for the IWW was convicted in large part for what it had been in the past"(5). Identified by its past actions and utterances the IWW could not divest itself of those connotations. Also by emphasizing the concept of a capitalist master class and refusing to abandon the right to strike the IWW retained the very concepts that ensured its suppression.

Wilson was certainly in no mood to brook opposition, from 1915 onwards he had helped foster a national defence mentality which increased fears about the radicalism of labour, so the IWW's being lukewarm over preparedness soon called its patriotism into doubt. In his State of the Union Address to Congress as early as December 1915 he was saying that "the gravest threats against our national peace and safety have been uttered within our borders. There are citizens of the United States, I blush to admit, born under other flags, but welcomed by our generous naturalisation laws .... who have poured the poison of disloyalty into the very arteries of our national life"(6). By speaking as he did he called into question the loyalty of any person

who expressed a dissenting opinion. On 14 June 1916 he actually said that "disloyalty must be absolutely crushed"(7) and in September attacked "certain groups and combinations of men amongst us who were born under foreign flags" and suggested that such men had "injected the poison of disloyalty into our most critical affairs, (and) laid violent hands upon many of our industries"(8). On 2 April 1917 he suggested that "if there should be disloyalty it will be dealt with with a firm hand of stern repression"(8). In June 1917 he warned that Germany was using "liberals, socialists, the leaders of labor to carry out their designs"(9), and said that "may God have mercy on them, for they need expect none from an outraged people and an avenging government"(10).

The calling up of the National Guard for federal service in 1917 deprived most states of their most effective anti-radical forces. Under the constitution federal troops could only be used to suppress local disturbances if federal laws were broken. They could only move even then if the governor certified that the state was unable to cope, and the president had issued a proclamation ordering the insurrectionists to disperse by a certain time. All of these rules were flouted when the administration moved against the IWW. The use of federal troops in local strikes was unusual and unconstitutional, but the war emergency gave the move a certain bogus legality. At the moment that IWW led workers looked like achieving breakthroughs in strikes in the lumber and copper industries in the North-West the federal government broke the strikes by their use of federal troops as strikebreakers.

As William Preston perceptively declares, "a strike could now be labelled not only a legitimate labor struggle, but also a seditious interference with the war effort depending upon need"(11). The administration disliked strikes that interfered with war production, but handled them in different ways. It tolerated strikes by AFL unions and dealt with the issues raised by mediation and conciliation; but there was no such sympathetic flexibility for the IWW. The IWW revival from 1915 onwards in the lumber, mining and agricultural areas of the mid-West, established them as a menace to numerous communities vital to the war effort. Prosecuting attorneys in Washington and Montana and federal agents in the Bureau of Investigation all certified to the peaceful nature of the 1917 IWW-led lumber strike, but lumber operators and the administration were fearful of IWW job control over the industry. Thus government action was not based on the realities that its own agents reported or on the world as it was; instead it was based on the anxieties of an important section of the public - the employer class. When the IWW leadership

issued a regional general strike call on 20 August 1917 to protest against government sponsored repression the military moved in and occupied large areas of Arizona and Montana until 1921. As Preston says “surveillance, occupation and suppression marked the wartime participation of federal troops in the drive against subversive labor elements”(12).

Not only was the Army employed against radicals but the strength and scope of various “internal security” agencies were also increased . Military intelligence agents engaged in a wide range of dubious activities not only against the IWW, but also against the SPA and civil liberties and pacifist groups. The most novel force used by the administration, however, was the American Protective League (APL) a privately funded volunteer force operating under the Department of Justice. The relationship of the APL to Justice, and whether or not its agents could make arrests, was deliberately left vague. Its members infiltrated radical groups, broke into buildings, wiretapped, bugged and opened mail. The head of the APL urged his lieutenants to obtain financial support from businessmen “who usually are the ones who benefit in a property sense by the protection offered by our organization”(15). John Roche calls the APL “a government sponsored lynchmob”(14). What the Army, Justice and the APL could do best was to provide the overt control of radicalism and sense of action hysterical citizens were demanding from their government. This gave other government departments the time they needed to search for a longer lasting legal precedent to move against the IWW.

At first the Department of Justice could find no federal law it could use against the IWW. This problem could only be resolved by the passage of emergency legislation. The administration was thus instrumental in pushing through Congress the Espionage Act 1917 and the Sedition Act 1918. The former could result in a twenty year sentence for those found guilty of deliberately hindering the war effort. Empowered by the act the Post Office could stop articles going through the mail, and in this way strangled the radical press. Wilson argued for harsher penalties but Congress would not allow the direct censorship of the press. The Sedition Act outlawed virtually all criticism of the war effort or government.

The administration also had an arsenal of other weapons. In Autumn 1917 Wilson issued new orders so that all German males over fourteen had to register with the government; they were debarred from entering many areas and were expelled from Washington D.C; they had to have

permission to travel, to change their residence and were barred from entering ports. In all this covered 600,000 German-Americans. On 17 April 1917 Wilson started a programme designed to debar from public service all people deemed to be "inimical to the public welfare"(15). Under the Trading With The Enemy Act of 6 October 1917 all foreign language papers had to be submitted to the Post Office for approval. The Immigration Act of 1918 extended the concept of guilt by association and so made it easier to deport members of organisations deemed to be threatening - although to the administration's chagrin many IWW and SPA members were native born.

In large part the government, using its best legal brains, built its case against the IWW on expressions of opinion about capitalism, the class struggle, sabotage, militarism, war and conscription, much of this material predated the war and the passage of the emergency legislation! Only in the IWW Sacramento trial could the government introduce to any great extent evidence of vandalism or the destruction of private property. As William Preston showed, the trials "provided a sense of public reassurance, the product of clamor more than truth"(16). By the end of the war virtually everyone who had played a prominent role in the IWW was in prison, not just the top leaders, but second and third string leaders as well, many of them being held for things they had said before the war.

The failure to protect the IWW's civil liberties pointed the way to the eventual collapse of solidarity among liberal exponents of such matters. The IWW stood alone as no one dared speak up for them, such was the atmosphere the administration had created. The one man who could have called off these prosecutions was Woodrow Wilson. He chose not to because instinctively and philosophically he detested the IWW class war theories of society. To him the IWW were a "menace to organized society and the right conduct of industry"(17). The IWW's equivocal stand on the war was bound to hurt a man of Wilson's temperament; to call it a capitalist war was to sneer and mock him; and so no appeals for IWW civil liberties would impress him. His political and economic philosophy left him personally unmoved by the misfortunes of the IWW. As he told the attorney-general, "the IWW ... are certainly worthy of being suppressed"(18).

Clearly those who suffered most were those whose views on the war were derived from some objectionable economic or social doctrine, irrespective of their views on the Central Powers. Prominent newspapers and politicians in both the main parties criticised the government and the war effort yet they never suffered at the hands of the government. Clearly the bias was towards crushing the IWW and SPA. Whilst the IWW was destroyed the SPA was only severely weakened. Gabriel Kolko has even argued that "the facts show that the party gained in strength and popularity as a result of its anti-war stand"(19). But at the moment when American socialism appeared to be on the verge of significant political and organisational success it was gravely weakened by a combination of federal and State repression. The party was probably naive in believing it would be treated fairly by the political authorities, and as a result its press was damaged, its leadership imprisoned and its ideological heart - the rural mid-West - was cut out.

The AFL showed only unconcern as these groups' civil liberties were denied, but then it was the biggest beneficiary of the assault. Its role in the crushing of the IWW was quite active. The path from Justice to the AFL building was two-way with both organisations freely trading information on known or perceived radicals. Steven Larson actually believes that the AFL and government worked so closely together that "an alliance to crush radical labor groups such as the IWW"(20) was formed. Whilst keen to rid itself of the irritant that was the IWW, the AFL was also motivated by a real fear of repression itself if it did not back the government, and obviously hoped for government aid if it did. Gompers certainly played on the administration's fear of radicalism, raising the possibility that if concessions were not granted he might be ousted. Gompers actually told Wilson that he must "deal with the representatives of the bona fide organized constructive labor movement of the country or they will have the alternative of being forced to take the consequences of the so-called IWW with all that implies"(21). It is the new working relationship between the administration and the AFL that developed during the war we shall examine now.

## The AFL And The War

War brought prosperity, and as in the past, prosperity brought labour unrest. The now favourable labour market differed from earlier shortages of supply only in degree, certainly not in kind. War also brought another factor into play - military needs demanded full and uninterrupted production. To ensure labour peace the administration, in the words of David Brody, knew it would have to "intervene massively in labor-management relations that had hitherto been completely private"(22). American involvement in the war produced a need for a "large unit coordinated economy"(23), aimed at producing large quantities of goods; it also required the control of the economy and society by a large and powerful government. The direction of the war was, however, a new experience for everyone, and so confusion abounded in official circles in Washington. Urofsky actually believes "there was an almost criminal negligence in the Wilson administration in preparing the country's defenses - especially its industrial resources - from 1914 to 1917"(24).

Clearly the administration realised that labour would need placating as their ability to make the economy malfunction was considerable. The Department of Labor should have been the agency to prevent industrial unrest and to coordinate the activities of the several government departments involved with labor. It was not, however, in a position to render such a service. Only two of its bureaus - Labor Statistics and the Childrens' Bureau - were of real value in war labour work; the other bureaus lacked statutory authority for their actions, and Congress was unwilling to grant these powers to a department it distrusted. The department was not only hampered by congressional opposition, it was also bothered by a general lack of funds and the continued hostility of many employers. However, the blame for the Department of Labor not being allowed to manage labour relations does not rest solely with Congress. William Wilson was timid in pressing his case, even when he had the president's support.

For almost nine months the administration tried to meet the war crisis by using peace-time methods and failed. Wilson had to acknowledge that the older methods of management were not working and that a new direction had to be found. Even before America actually entered the war Secretary Baker entered into an informal pact with Gompers, with President Wilson's tacit approval, under which the first of a number of government boards were set up to deal with labour. On 29 August 1916 Congress gave its approval to the setting up of the Council for



National Defense (CND) with members including the secretaries for War, the Navy, Agriculture, Commerce and Labor. Gompers was co-opted on to the CND as one of its many vice-presidents, and was also made chairman of its Labor Committee. The job carried no salary, but it gave Gompers the opportunity he had long sought to have labour's voice heard properly in government circles. It also gave him the official respectability he felt he deserved. He acquired prestige and recognition beyond his wildest dreams. There were few important officials to whom Gompers did not now have easy access, so much so that some of Wilson's cabinet colleagues felt he was closer to the president than they were themselves.

The CND had two major functions: to coordinate all forms of transportation and to survey industrial resources. On 13 December 1917 a CND interdepartmental conference came up with the following recommendations:

- 1 There is a need to set up a machinery for solving labor disputes.
- 2 Provisions have to be drawn up to provide for an adequate supply of labor.
- 3 Labor needs protection - both in the workplace and from unscrupulous employers.
- 4 Living conditions need safeguarding.
- 5 There is a need to develop an educational publicity agency which will win over labor-farmer organisations to American involvement in the war.

This was the role given to Sam Gompers. The AFL was deliberately brought into a partnership with the administration and capital. Many AFL officers sat on government boards. Gompers insisted that any labor members on a board had to come from organised labor. The administration, however, was not willing to allow the AFL to get too far above its natural station. They would not allow labour representation on any committee that handled the allocation of war contracts. Labor was only ever allowed to sit on boards that handled labor disputes. The administration certainly offended the AFL by refusing to give it full recognition and representation on non-labour committees. On the vast majority employers were represented but workers were not. Even though Gompers gave employers full representation on his labor committee, the chairmen on other committees, mostly businessmen, failed to give

labour equal recognition, even when the CND called “as a matter of justice and democratic principle” for “representatives of employees as well as employers to determine national economic policies”(25).

There remained a large part of industry not covered by the CND or any other government agency. This shortcoming shows that there is a lot more to a successful war labour policy than the mere adjustment of wages and the prevention of strikes. The administration's lack of an overall policy, and the decentralised method of handling war contracts, made it essential that other agencies had to be speedily set up and empowered. Much of this was done hastily and was ill-thought out. The speed with which these agencies grew and the personnel recruited made it impossible to give those functions the care they required. Thus the administration struggled to cope as their war labor policy was being hampered by both the new realities of the socio-economic situation and the absence of a uniform central direction in administration policies. Robert Cuff clearly feels that bureaucratic infighting and the absence of an accepted central plan was true right across the board and not just in the area of labour (26).

With labour turnover and strikes reaching unprecedented levels William Wilson, Secretary Baker and Gompers all urged President Wilson in August 1917 to appoint a special commission to investigate wartime upheavals and make recommendations. The result was the President's Mediation Commission (PMC) with William Wilson in the chair and AFL representation. Clearly the setting up of the PMC was an admission of failure on the part of the Department of Labor as it was then constituted to deal with labour problems created by the war. The appointment of Wilson as chairman was merely to help him keep face. While the PMC did good work in regional disputes it also passed on recommendations to the president regarding labour policies overall. Acting upon these the president called upon all sides to meet in a War Labor Conference to devise a programme to govern labor-management relations. The board soon discovered that the existing method of dealing with labor problems was unsatisfactory, with each department acting on its own without regard to the needs of other departments. Obviously this led to duplication, lack of uniformity and conflict. Possibly the gravest failing was that no nationwide disputes board existed. For these reasons the president had to acknowledge that peace time methods were failing. The CND echoed that feeling when it

argued for a system that would provide for an adequate and stable labour supply to war industries, and argued that this could only be ensured by a system of labour bureaus, by better training and by a priorities agencies to determine the needs of competing industries.

To help ease the mounting problems the President created the National War Labor Board (NWLB) and patterned its operating responsibilities on the conference's and CND recommendations. The NWLB was set up to encourage the settling of disputes through conciliation and mediation. Gompers was co-opted on to the NWLB. He was one of five AFL officers to sit on it, they were of course counter-balanced by five representatives from industry. Ex-president Taft was co-chairman with Frank Walsh of CIR fame. Many labour men were concerned about Taft's appointment, seeing him as a reactionary. He did, however, do much to redeem his good name before labour by his wartime actions. Labor certainly got more from Taft than employers did from Walsh.

The board was empowered to prevent strikes and lock-outs, to prevent undue interference with union organised shops, to extend collective bargaining, and to prevent unions or workers from extending into non-union areas by the use of coercive methods. During its short lifetime the NWLB developed a number of procedures to resolve disputes and to give power to its policies. It certainly did prevent the more extreme anti-union employer practices such as blacklisting, espionage, surveillance and yellow dog contracts. It also devised effective remedies to prevent discrimination because of legitimate union activity. Importantly though the board would not compel companies to bargain collectively with unions. Whilst firms could not compel membership of a company union, they did not have to accept the unionisation of their plants. As a sop to both proselytising unionists and to employers the NWLB did order the establishment of works committees in non-union shops as a compromise. Clearly whilst unions were often able to attain a controlling element on these committees the policy was not to AFL tastes. Many open shop employers seized on this loop hole, David Brody recorded J.D.Rockefeller advising Judge Gary to "be sure that the shop committee is of your best employees and not a committee appointed by outside agencies; an employee representation plan, if protected from union infiltration promises a safe defense from interference from Washington"(27). Whilst the principal function of the NWLB was "to settle by mediation and conciliation controversies arising between employers and workers in fields of production necessary for the effective conduct of war"(28), the code developed by it tended to favour labor

only because they were already in a weaker position in industry. Although labour benefitted more at the expense of employers in the majority of NWLB decisions, labour did still remain more at government mercy than were employers. William Wilson in answer to the many enquiries on the relation of the board to his department maintained that "the board was an integral part of the department, but that its decisions were uncontrolled"(29). Clearly employers would have been even more reluctant to submit to its powers had William Wilson dominated it.

By 1918 few areas of war production were without access to some specially devised adjustment agency. To better coordinate their activities yet another board was formed, the War Labor Policies Board (WLPB). This new board had representatives from each of the other major war agencies and departments involved with labour. By determining standards for wages, hours and working conditions, then imposing these standards through federal agencies, it was hoped the WLPB would end instability in the labour market. Unfortunately the WLPB was unable to enforce a nationwide standardisation policy, and was criticised on all sides. One of the strongest criticisms was voiced by John Lombardi that "it had a large and costly staff of experts, who saw small parts of the labor problem intensively, and saw nothing in large"(30).

This semi self-regulatory method of industrial relations was ineffectual in many areas but especially so on the railways. Here the labour situation, even after the Adamson Act, looked menacing. The pressures of wartime working swept away many peacetime practices, including virtually everything conceded under Adamson. Wartime operating difficulties looked like they would worsen an already dangerously overheated situation. So much so that the federal government was finally obliged to step in and attempt to minimise these problems, but only after much prevaricating, and only when conditions were near acute. By the middle of 1917 the labour situation was critical, with an acute shortage exacerbated by conscription. The sharp rise in the cost of living soon began to produce wild-cat strikes, which labour alleged were being made worse by managerial manipulation. Labour feared that the management might use a local rail dispute to push its case for mandatory arbitration, which was one of the issues behind the troubles in 1916. The rail management and the federal government remained inactive before this mounting crisis, to such an extent that Wilson's system of traffic priorities was soon in shreds. This combined with labour calls for industrial action to improve their working conditions and rates of pay made the situation look bleak.

The Brotherhood chiefs had assured Wilson that there would be no strikes during the war, but even before 1917 was over they began to see that they had been optimistic. As an initial response Wilson tried to get the management to accept labour's demands by promising federal aid; this failed when the management tried to use the crisis to further their political ends by asking Congress to exclude the industry from anti-trust statutes. At this point Treasury Secretary MacAdoo stepped in to argue against increased federal aid, in its place he proposed outright federal control of the rail service. Wilson was instinctively against any form of state ownership believing it to be inherently socialistic in principle. He was also against it as he did not feel the federal government could command the loyalty of rail labour.

MacAdoo was remarkably successful in changing his father-in-law's mind. Whilst he was won over he was still worried that MacAdoo's reputation as a Wallstreet promoter would be enough to turn labour against him, but Tumulty and Brandeis convinced him otherwise. They also argued for the introduction of Taylorist techniques, forgetting that the manipulation of the industry in this way would disrupt the existing bargaining system. This notwithstanding, the administration took control of the rail network. In so doing it brought far reaching changes in the bargaining relations of rail politics. As K. Austin Kerr has highlighted, the political innovations behind federal control involved more than merely shifting power away from the old regulatory system to a management-dominated rail administration, for the transport needs of the war that had to be met by the proponents of federal control demanded capital-labour cooperation. The workforce had considerable control over labour relations, and MacAdoo came to sympathise with many labour aspirations. The government increased wages, standardised work practices and improved conditions all to help appease labour. MacAdoo also helped the Brotherhoods achieve one of their long sought goals: national standardisation of wages and rules on the rail networks.

The railways administration was in many ways a model; an example of what the Wilson administration could have achieved elsewhere in the economy had the president had the courage to intervene more forcefully, and allowed his government to provide a more dynamic role. He was though merely content to let labour and business co-exist as before, whilst being overseen by government agencies which would only intervene and attempt to regulate conditions when a clash of interests developed. It was only the imminent collapse of the rail network under the added burden of wartime pressures and the threat of a strike over wages that

prompted Wilson to accept MacAdoo's plans for a nationalised system. Thus it is to MacAdoo, and not Wilson, that the praise must go for its working so well. Certainly wildcat strikes and threats of a national stoppage plagued MacAdoo, but he was able to meet most of these threats. With Wilson's blessing he banned workers from indulging in political activity, always a dangerous thing in a democracy, even in time of war. Yet despite grumbles over this labour stayed friendly to him.

MacAdoo used private managers to run the various divisions of the rail administration, a device also used by Wilson. They relied heavily on their preferred organisation, corporate management, bringing into government service many managers from private industry. In 1913 Wilson had sought men for office who shared his philosophical standpoint; Daniels knew little of naval matters, MacAdoo of banking, Bryan of foreign affairs. But by 1917 ideology counted for little, experience and ability were all, thus many appointees were businessmen whose sole concern was with getting the job done. Organisations like the NCF were also heavily involved in the running of the wartime organisation, with many of its more prominent members winning places in the government, including Gompers. Private corporate management permeated the whole enlarged wartime administration, which is more than can be said for unionists, whose contribution to the public service was deliberately curtailed. In reality their sole preserve was in those areas directly affected by them, and no others.

During the war union membership rose from 3,014,000 in 1917 to 4,169,000 a year later. In the immediate post-war period it surged again as the conscripts came home to 5,110,000, the highest level in its history (31). Thus the AFL was jubilant at the war's end from the increase in their membership rolls, from the level of respectability and recognition afforded their leadership and from the concessions they had managed to claw from the administration and from management. Unions had expanded into firms that had previously excluded them, and even into some new industries, like meatpacking; some inroads were even made into steel. Many company unions, however, had also developed.

Many of the Administration's agencies were hamstrung by Wilson's insistence that they must use public opinion to compel obedience to their decisions rather than rely upon the power of legal enforcement. This was not always possible and then emergency action was necessary.

The Western Union Telegraph Company refused to listen when Wilson personally asked them to reinstate workers sacked for joining a union, so he ordered the company to be taken over. The Commercial Telegraphers' Union, despite its name a company and not a union, also came under government control when it discharged union members. This was a double edged sword, however, as workers in the telegraph industry in general found the Post Office Department a difficult employer, but then Postmaster-General Burleson was no lover of organised labour. While Wilson allowed the taking over of companies which unfairly discharged workers for union activities, he was equally keen to pressurize workers into going back to work in time of dispute and to trust in their officers to help them. Of the large corporations placed under government control the transfers were always more one of form than of substance, as most of the existing management stayed in place and usually continued to act as before. Without doubt criticisms can be raised against Wilson's wartime practices; certainly there was a chronic lack of centralisation; there was an absence of regard or knowledge by government agencies of practices in other departments; different wage rates were being paid for the same job by different agencies; there was simply too much competition for workers, so the highest paying employer won. This instability simply fed the already excessively high labour turnover, and so delayed production, increased costs and caused tension. One of the most serious weaknesses, however, was that most of the war labour programme was voluntary, and so was subject to the vested interests of those who took part. Melvin Urofsky felt that the entire federal regulation of the economy was shaped along the lines the leaders of big industry wanted, that Wilson acquiesced in this policy because he felt high production could only be guaranteed if industry was left unhampered in this way, and so businessmen were left unsupervised to reshape the economy along lines acceptable to them. He even charges Wilson with "an almost criminal negligence" (32) in preparing the nation's economy for war between 1914 to 1917.

It is certainly true that Wilson and his officers believed totally in free enterprise and the profit motive, and it is conceivable that these beliefs could be exploited by businessmen; especially when Wilson delegated power and responsibility so totally to his subordinates. Urofsky is thus quite correct to posit an alternative strategy that Wilson could have followed, one where he restricted big business, encouraged smaller concerns, had a more effective tax programme and insisted upon a more thorough protection of labour's rights. Wilson's pre-occupation with maximum industrial output meant that he never even seriously entertained an alternative plan of action and so labour was marginalised. The journalist Robert Bruere commented most wisely in February 1918 on the state of Wilsonian labour politics "at the very moment when

the nation was making a patriotic appeal to the workers to get out a maximum production ... The Department of Justice was arresting them, the PMC was telling them that they must organize into unions, and the Supreme Court was announcing that if they attempted to organize under certain conditions they would be guilty of contempt of court''(33).

Naturally there are different views on the AFL's wartime practices: that the government bestowed numerous favours and advantages on labour, or that labour leaders bound their workers so tightly that they effectively got nothing of any lasting value out of the war. The daily functioning of the wartime administration, the peripheral nature of labour leaders' contributions to the overall whole, the swift dismantling of the whole structure after the war, combined with growing grass-roots labour militancy and an employers-administration counter attack on labour all tend to reinforce the view that labour perhaps did not achieve all it could have done, but that the deck was loaded against a fair game. If labour leaders were unsuccessful, and they probably were, it was frequently because of circumstances beyond their immediate control. Devices for minimising friction only appeared gradually and often did not work properly even then. Solutions reached at the top were often unacceptable at local level. Also many government concessions only came piecemeal, and only when serious industrial difficulties arose, as on the railways. Government intervention worked best where strong, pro-AFL, unions already existed. In many steel and munitions plants the employers successfully stood off government boards and their decisions. Thus the workers who benefitted most were those already organised before the war began. Whenever unions had real strengths, or solid footholds before the war, huge gains were made. Wherever good organizers could spread the gospel gains were made. Only where unions were absent pre-war, or where they fought among themselves, did employers prevail; but the end of the war changed the whole picture.

### Reconstruction And Reaction

The leadership of the AFL soon had reason to be disappointed with the government's post war attitude. The war had exposed workers' desires to participate in the running of the nation. Mere wage increases alone would no longer satisfy them, nor would they placidly accept a return to pre-war bargaining practices. In the immediate postwar period radical elements in the AFL renewed their calls for the movement to restructure along industrial lines feeling that the



existing craft predominance served only to weaken labour. Despite membership gains and the movement's successes during the war dissatisfaction with the leadership was growing, with many of the newer members being unwilling to accept the traditional, cautious AFL approach to business. Many of them were also impatient with government constraints and official attitudes in general. Wartime responsibilities had, however, had a sobering effect on the already cautious AFL leadership, enhancing their already pronounced tendency to compromise when pressurised from above. Thus the radicalizing of a growing number of AFL members was a matter of some concern. The AFL executive council were to some extent hampered by Gompers himself in their efforts to restructure to meet these challenges. As he got older he was becoming more set in his ways, and was manifesting a worrying tendency to be less than willing to work with perceived radicals.

In an effort to oppose the radicals in their ranks the executive council adopted a reconstruction programme in 1918 which called for government ownership, operation and regulation of public utilities; increased government control of corporations; government financing of low-cost housing, and general demands for more union say in the determination of public policies. What the executive council failed to understand was that their call for more industrial democracy and their move into new uncharted areas was not seen by employers as a bulwark against radicalism, but was instead perceived to be a challenge to the right to manage. As far as American management was concerned the end of the war heralded the end of their truce with labour. In the immediate post war period they pushed for the rapid dismantling of all government agencies, the deflation of prices and wages, and all moves to rationalisation. The armistice freed the hand of management, the public prohibition against union discrimination was no longer in force, nor was the need for continued full production.

The employers of America were aided in their stand against labour by the official attitude of the Wilson administration to the question of reconstruction. Wilson was certainly sceptical about all reconstruction plans, especially those that were wide in scope. Two days before the armistice was signed Wilson forced the cancellation of plans to discuss reconstruction with the CND. Realistically, though, large reconstruction plans were probably always doomed to failure. The troops simply wanted to quit the service whether they had jobs or not, the public was war weary, business wanted an end to government restraint, and labour was suspicious of

any plan that did not accord it a leading part. Thus reconstruction quickly became a simple effort to revert to pre-war conditions as quickly as possible. Nearly all the wartime agencies were allowed to dissolve or were abandoned when their funding ceased. One of the first to lose its effectiveness was the NWLB.

While Wilson hoped to solve the problems of reconstruction by ignoring them and pretending they did not exist, his cabinet colleagues were free to take their cue from him. Clearly Wilson was hoping the country could return immediately to its pre-war status, and seemed to think it could be done without federal involvement. Unfortunately, reconstruction was not going to be that simple. Many federal agency officials felt the absence of a rational plan would only precipitate severe problems, and they were proved correct. Clearly they remembered the difficulties of gearing up the country for war, and hoped to avoid the same kind of problem converting the country back to peacetime working. Wilson effectively ignored their pleading, and compounded these domestic difficulties - the problem of organising a smooth return to peacetime conditions, the need to minimise capital-labour unrest, and to make positive moves to offset the fragmentation of his electoral base - by simply ignoring all his problems in his headlong flight to Europe to win Allied approval for the League of Nations. He was now more concerned with foreign than domestic matters, and so he argued for the line to be held against wage increases. Wilson shared with Lloyd George a talent for delaying decisions when confronted by powerful union demands. Clearly he felt that to concede wage increases or power to unions now would only inhibit business' ability to cope with the coming deflation.

Wilson's postwar indifference to the AFL was also linked to electoral issues. The Republican triumphs in 1918, at least in part, were linked to disenchantment at his domestic policies, especially his alleged trucking with labour. Small wonder that during 1918-1919 he ignored all calls to help save the wartime agencies as they were closed down. Wilson's repression of radicals during the war had done a great deal to fragment the coalition he had created in 1916, as George Creel noted, "all the radical and liberal friends of your anti-imperialist war policy were either silenced or intimidated. The Department of Justice and the Post Office were allowed to silence and intimidate them .... There was no voice to argue for your sort of peace"(34).

With the breaking up of his electoral base went his chances of success with the League in America and re-election in 1920. Thus with both Houses of Congress in Republican hands and his electoral base in pieces Wilson had need to rebuild a new coalition. Advice about how was not long in coming. Tumulty argued that high wages were bad for consumers, and hence for Democrats. He felt that Wilson had already done enough to assure the Democrats of labour's continued support and so he advised against the granting of further concessions to labour and felt that if they did that "the country at large would think that we are making a special appeal to labour at this time. If there is any class in this country to which we have been over generous it has been labour .... I think that this class owes us more than they have been willing to give"(35). Wilson followed Tumulty's advice, and so the AFL leadership were to find their access to the president lessening dangerously. With his unconcern with developments at home, his preoccupation with the League, his electoral problems, and growing physical incapacity, union leaders could no longer be sure of meeting the president at all.

The immediate post war period saw a rise in the number of strikes. More workers struck during 1919 than were to strike for the next six years or for the entire 1923-1932 period, a record never since surpassed. In Seattle there was even a short attempt at a general strike called in support of striking metal workers. It lasted for almost five days and completely paralysed the city. Leading businessmen made no secret of the fact that they were very much against this new phenomenon in labour tactics, and as a result violence was widely used in its suppression. There was also widespread discontent among the various police forces in the country over their levels of pay and their working conditions, which culminated in a police strike in Boston with 85% of the force not at work. This led to twenty four hours of some of the worst rioting and looting ever seen in an American city. Wilson called the policemen's action "a crime against humanity"(36). These strikes were local affairs, but both had national implications due to the issues they raised, and the change in strike tactics they showed. More significant strikes, however, were to be seen in the coal and steel industries.

A growing gap between the cost of living and wages was a major factor in the miners' strike. Since October 1917 miners had been working under an agreement with operators and Fuel Administrator Garfield that was only intended to cover the period of the war, and that was scheduled for renewal or renegotiation on 31 March 1920. The increasing cost of living made the miners restive, they became even more so when the operators would not approve a pay rise.

William Wilson hoped the president would intervene and prevent a walk out, but all he did was declare that any strike would be a breach in the agreement made with Garfield, going on to claim that "such an action would create a disastrous fuel famine, paralyse industry, force many workers out of employment", so that a strike "under these circumstances was not only unjustifiable, it was unlawful"(39). With the public backing his stand he asked the mine leaders to rescind the strike call. William Wilson responded by working even harder on his cabinet colleagues as they wanted even more drastic measures, but was unsuccessful in his bid to stop Attorney-General Palmer getting an injunction against the miners.

Palmer secured from Judge Anderson a restraining order on the basis that the strike was a violation of the Lever Act. The general impression when the act was passed in August 1917 was that it did not apply to labour. When the bill had gone before Congress the AFL had argued for the inclusion of the Hollis amendment which stipulated that the act would not apply to labour. Attorney-General Gregory, Herbert Hoover and the president had all assured Gompers and Frank Morrison that the act did not limit strikes, and so Gompers had not pressed the issue. Thus the administration was now justifiably accused of acting in bad faith. After a fruitless meeting with Palmer over the injunction Gompers, Morrison and Wall condemned the government's stand. The **New Republic** believed the action had excited "in the workingmen of the country a resentment against the existing operation of law and contempt for the vaunted impartiality of the government"(38).

The injunction failed to open the mines, but it did stop the UMW leaders aiding their workers. Thus the following week the cabinet, again over William Wilson's objections, voted to invoke court action. On 8 November 1919 Palmer secured a court order compelling the UMW leaders to rescind the strike in three days. This action was unprecedented, in that it demanded the performance of a positive act, whereas injunctions were usually negative in that they restrained people from committing certain prescribed acts. The court order was obeyed, but the men stayed out. The cabinet again sided with Palmer and Garfield, over William Wilson's objections, and decided to prosecute nine UMW leaders. The leaders were actually arrested and federal troops were ordered to move into the coal areas. Federal agents were allowed to tap telephones, and agents were sent to spy on the UMW, and non-Americans were threatened with summary deportation. During the course of the strike over eighty UMW officers were cited for contempt. With the operators unbending and the administration so openly against

them the strike collapsed in ruins on 10 December 1919 when the UMW accepted a government approved mediation plan giving them some of the things they struck for in the first instance. Some historians, John Lombardi amongst them, actually doubt that Wilson personally participated in the events leading up to the injunction of 1 November 1919. He had returned from Europe in September because of ill health and from then until December he attended no cabinet meetings. William Wilson certainly believed that Palmer, Garfield and Tumulty were directing affairs, and that they were not acting as the president would wish. Wherever the final blame may ultimately lie it is certainly true that by using an injunction to stop the strike the government fundamentally changed the attitudes of many working people to the Wilson administration and the president himself; undoing at a stroke all the good work many administration officials and the AFL executive council had laboured to perform since 1913.

By 1919 steel had replaced the railways as the single most important industry in America. Like most mass production industries US Steel employed huge numbers of unskilled and semi-skilled labour. After the success of the wartime years many AFL organisers were determined to unionise this industry. On 29 August 1919 Gompers and the members of the steel organising committee met Wilson, their sole request was that he would arrange a meeting with the company chairman Judge Gary. Wilson promised to do his best and said that "the time has passed when any man should refuse to meet representatives of his employees" (39). Gary would not accede to Wilson's request; he did, however, attempt to lay his side of the story before the president in a four page letter. The entire tone of the letter was conciliatory, clearly whilst he was opposed to unions he left the impression he would not resist strong administration pressure to settle. Wilson did not reply to the letter. It was found years later by Ray Stannard Baker unopened in the president's files. Had he seen it Wilson might have attempted a more direct approach, not seeing it Wilson remained inactive. He could have acted on this own initiative to force Gary to see the AFL representatives, but he simply did not want to get enmeshed and did not want to put his prestige on the line for a cause where success looked so doubtful. Gary, insulted by Wilson's apparent rudeness, stood firm. On 22 September 1919 the walkout began. It was only partial, but it still exceeded in scope and magnitude anything in the nation's experience - a quarter of a million workers were on strike. After four years of continuous production and massive wartime profits the employers involved were in a good position to stand firm. Many AFL officers only too well aware of this fact urged caution, Gompers prominent among them, but the pressure to strike came from below.

On 28 August 1919 Secretary Lane had asked Wilson to call a conference of labour, capital and the public to resolve the nation's mounting industrial problems. Wilson agreed saying "the object of all reform in this essential matter must be a genuine democratization of industry based upon the full recognition of the rights of those who work, in whatever rank, to participate in some organic way in every decision which directly affects their welfare or the part they play in industry"(40). This industrial conference gave the unions an arena for bringing public pressure on US Steel. A prominent speaker on industrial affairs, principal of Harvard University C.W.Eliot felt that their hopes of success and of the conference actually solving anything were doomed from the beginning, as its organisation into three groups merely increased existing tensions. Clearly capital and labour were too entrenched in the attitudes of the past to successfully embrace the future. On 9 October the labour group launched a frontal assault by calling on the conference to both intervene in the steel dispute and for a resolution endorsing collective bargaining and allowing workers to pick representatives of their own choice. Lane called this "a bit of audacious labor politics, fine strategy from a labor standpoint"(41), but it crippled the conference because it forced it to consider the question of settling a specific strike before it had had time to consider the causes of all strikes. Gompers' brave gamble failed to get the necessary majority it needed and both plans were voted out. The labour delegation walked out in disgust, hamstringing the conference and bringing the steel strike no closer to a conclusion.

The huge volume of press coverage the strike generated certainly did not aid the workers. **The New York Times** said "the leaders are radicals, social and industrial revolutionaries"(42). **The New York Tribune** felt the dispute was "another experiment at Bolshevizing American industry"(43). **The Chicago Tribune** said "the decision means a choice between the American system and the Russian"(44). The management, ever keen to secure public support, hammered the point that many of the strikers were immigrants, and that their actions were both unAmerican and radically suspect. The strike leadership were also pilloried as dangerous radicals, especially William Foster whose ex-IWW background came back to haunt him. The radical issue squashed the strikers' main hope for a settlement, steel was under no public pressure to deal with radicals, and won some support for actually refusing to deal. As with the miners so too with the steelworkers, the administration refused to aid them. Key men in the administration, especially Tumulty and Palmer, opposed them. Tumulty was convinced he saw "abundant evidence on every side that propaganda is afoot to advance the Soviet idea"(45). The president, effectively incapacitated after a stroke, applied no brake to those smaller men. Administrative indifference turned to active partnership when federal troops

went to Gary, Indiana. State and federal judges were also encouraged to develop more extreme rulings to further restrict picketing, and to return America to its anti-union normality. The strike, always only partial, finally cracked when the skilled workers, primarily American born, began to return to work, and by January 1920 the end had come.

The strike was probably the single most important strike in America after the Pullman strike of 1894. It was of vital importance to the AFL for as Brody notes "if steel could be organized then so could the other mass production industries"(46). Dulles actually believes that "the whole labor history of the 1920s would have followed a completely different course"(47) had steel been organised, and he is quite correct to say so.

The culmination of post-war reaction came with the attacks on those of radical persuasion during the "Red Scare". Vigilantes, war veterans, businessmen, the press and the government all combined to "save" the country by trying to suppress all sorts of radicalism. Such groups were proscribed by law, free speech and assembly were suspended, duly elected members of state and national legislatures were denied their seats and suspected alien radicals were deported. In the annual report of the Attorney-General in 1921 he noted that ten states had anti-anarchy laws, seventeen had criminal syndicalism laws, twenty-four had laws against membership in ultra-radical groups, twenty-one against attendance at ultra-radical meetings, twenty-nine had anti-red flag laws and others had sedition and sabotage laws.

Clearly the actions against the IWW were only a prelude to the furore which accompanied suppression of radicalism in 1919. Attorney-General Palmer even tried for a peacetime federal sedition law, but he was refused, even though Wilson endorsed his request in his State of the Union address. William Preston believes that the "antagonisms for readjustment and revolution played on emotions still keyed to the fanaticism of war"(48). With the post war cessation of prosecutions under the Espionage and Sedition acts, Justice no longer had its emergency tools for overthrowing radicalism. Pardons Attorney James Finch was typical of many federal officers when he claimed that the war was merely the opening phase in the revolution, and that the opposition of radicals to the war had "only been incidental to their main purpose and object"(49).

Overt pressure was applied to numerous radical groups to crush them, but government policy followed subtle paths as well. The administration was careful to only parole those IWW members who severed their connections with the movement and who adopted a more reasonable attitude to American institutions. Finch actually conceded "that in many instances there was no evidence whatsoever to show that the defendants had ever done anything to violate the Selective Service Act or the Espionage Act"(50). Thus the government seemed to be less concerned with past objections to war than with past and present radical beliefs.

Justice, the Pardons Office and Wilson all shared in the formulation of postwar anti-radical policies. The Wilson administration set the tone followed by Republican administrations in the twenties. Gregory and Palmer both argued against any general amnesty, and Wilson abandoned his own predisposition to forgive because he was convinced of the IWW's criminal background. Regardless of the evidence upon which their convictions had been based the departments of Justice and Labor separated prisoners according to their attitude and tractability. The administration's amnesty programme depended not on the fairness of the punishment but on the amount of social unrest, or the supposed imminence of revolution. Wilson not only refused to support workers' aspirations after the war but as Melvin Urofsky said "the evidence shows that Wilson was guilty of allowing the public interest to be trampled on"(51). The Red Scare was eventually called off, but not before it had served its purpose.

By the early 1920s the already near useless Clayton Act - whose operation had been suspended during the war - was finally killed off by the Supreme Court, as was the Child Labor Act. Thus federal anti-trust laws could again be used against unions. Picketing was further limited, injunctions were once again used to hamstring labour. This combined with a severe depression in 1921-1922 rubbed further salt into AFL wounds and membership rolls began to fall. Before Wilson left office the AFL had been pushed back into their old bastions, their vaunted alliance with the Democrats in tatters, and worst of all - they had nowhere else to go. Gompers and his associates were in an unenviable position.



## Conclusions, Labour

Necessity had pushed the AFL into politics in 1906 and a working alliance with the Democrats soon developed, but what did labour get from the arrangement? A delegate at the 1920 AFL annual convention was plainly critical:

Sam Gompers cannot keep a straight and serious Countenance and allege that his 'political' policy has yet-fourteen years later - adjusted these grievances in labor's favor. You will find every one of these grievances repeated ... in 1919. The only one that has been adjusted is the seaman's grievance ... but this was not due to Sam Gompers. It was due to the efforts of Andrew Furuseth, Victor Lander and Senator LaFollette. And even that problem still exists .... The pitiful climax of Sam Gompers' political effort stands forth exposed to the world in the Wilson Administration. Never before has the leader of labor in the United States attained such influence with the government. Never again will Sam Gompers have so much prestige .... And what did it get the workers? Never before has a federal administration so ruthlessly and shamelessly trampled upon the rights of the worker. Never before had the misuse of the injunction to defeat the workers been so vicious. Never before have all the powers of government been so mobilised to defeat labour. And this has been done by the Wilson administration (52).

Melvin Dubofsky is equally dismissive and believes that "the great labor reforms of the Woodrow Wilson era occurred in the midst of war and collapsed in the disillusionment of peace"(53). The pre-1916 labour reforms which were an integral part of his election strategy did indeed become a new, more rounded, labour policy during the war. What Gompers failed to realise was that the power given to him and his organisation during the war was purely of a short-term nature and was done for emergency purposes. Once the war ended and the emergency was gone then so too were the powers removed. The situation existing during the war in America was not the beginning of a new dawn for labour, it was merely an armed truce. With the war over the administration allowed the AFL to be pushed by employers along the lines it found to be acceptable, and that was to create a politically neutralised, pro-capitalist labour movement. Given that organised labour was a minority of all labour, that its legal status was still in some doubt and that its organisation was deficient this was perhaps bound to happen. With capital in a uniquely strong position, with the courts antagonistic, with the SPA an

untested political ally and with the Republicans offering nothing, mainstream organised labour had nowhere else to go but to the Democrats, who as a minority party nationally would at least offer them a sympathetic ear. But that was ultimately all that was offered; the Wilson administration provided few rewards for the AFL's successful political mobilisation and finally smothered the adoption of a more politically active strategy by the movement in the post war years.

Jumping into bed with the Democrats was obviously a calculated risk, but perhaps one that Gompers' felt was worth taking. But then Gompers greatest strength was his opportunism, a character trait he shared with Wilson. Both men had no ultimate ends, being content to work for day to day improvements. This equipped Gompers to work with Wilson, a man equally keen never to define his beliefs or programme too clearly. Yet Gompers' strength was also his greatest weakness, for it meant that Wilson could use him for ends other than those Gompers wished to serve. Wilson certainly used him to keep the wilder elements in the labour world in check. By working as he did Gompers ossified the AFL and so it entered the twenties with an out-moded craft monopolised organisation that could not attract the unskilled, meet its own members' needs, or extract concessions from mass-production industries, like US Steel or the car industry, that still excluded unions. Marc Karson is quite correct to say that between 1906-1918 the AFL effectively gave its support solely to the Democrats, that they tolerated discrimination against negroes and racist attacks on Asians, and were indifferent to the plight of the unskilled, but then so was Wilson. But by becoming an adjunct of the party they allowed themselves to become nothing more than a minor pressure group who were only listened to when it offended nobody else.

Working together in their muddled inefficient ways Gompers and Wilson held back labour. Due to their efforts the labour movement as a whole did not achieve real power until the late 1930s. By preaching the doctrine of business-labour accommodation they relegated labour to a near permanent subordinate role. Obviously we can never know if the radicals in the IWW and SPA would ever have been successful with AFL help, but they were denied that aid, and when they looked like flourishing they were crushed by federal repression. When Gompers bowed out of public life he did so in the full knowledge that his calculated risk - of backing the Democrats - had brought his movement little of real tangible value.

### Conclusions, Woodrow Wilson

In the early twentieth century organised labour for the first time in American history represented a durable mass movement. As unions grew in size and industrial conflict spread federal policies and actions often proved to be the decisive factor in the success or failure of a venture. "Under Wilson labor became a persistent, inescapable national issue"(54), Dubofsky notes. He also feels that "at no point between 1913 and 1920 was there a clear, consistent federal policy towards workers and trades unions"(55) and it is here we must disagree. There was a line of consistency in Wilson's dealings with labour. As the head of a minority party nationally the support of labour was vital to the Democrats, but the practicalities of office and the need to remain on a friendly footing with other more powerful interest groups, meant that labour's voice never carried much weight. Even when bearing in mind the privileges that were granted to pro-war unionists between 1917 and 1918, and the pro-labour measures he put his signature to during this first term, it still remains quite clear that Wilson only ever saw labour as a minor pressure group. During the war Wilson and his colleagues showed themselves to be adept at appeasing, buying off and flattering the moderate AFL leadership so that they would conduct themselves along lines that were acceptable to the administration. They could understand, perhaps even empathise with the needs and aspirations of these workingmen. They wanted little and were polite in asking for it. This was certainly not the case with the IWW. The administration had little time for these radicals, afraid as they were of the changes those kind of people might bring to their comfortable world. The ideology of the IWW was threatening and hostile, these "Wobblies" challenged the assumptions they lived by. Thus the unique conditions of wartime America provided the administration with the opportunity they had long sought to move against them. Using a traditional if rather crude carrot and stick approach the AFL were bought off - recognizing union standards and practices, allowing large pay rises, taking over companies where the owners were uncooperative and giving AFL officers places on government boards - whilst the IWW were crushed - their members harassed, their leadership imprisoned and their organisation suppressed. Some of their officers stayed in prison well into the twenties, long after the need to hold them had gone. This shows a vindictiveness and a smallness of character which is perhaps unusual in the holders of elevated public office.

The standard approach to labour matters in the Wilson administration was that its needs would only be addressed when they were brought to the government's attention, when its demands were "reasonable", when helping labour would not alienate other more powerful pressure groups, and when its lobbying activities were kept well within the parameters of proper pressure group activity. This arrangement worked to the best interests of the AFL, as they were the only movement to fully accept the tenets of capitalism. The price of this cooperation - the so-called Wilson reforms - were a poor reward, they were of no great or lasting significance. They were passed because their time had come, because others were prepared to push through the legislation, and because granting these changes was of no great importance. Symbolic reform is easy, meaningful advances need to be forced out of legislatures. Labour fared indifferently because Wilson was the champion of a dying age, an unseeing victim of his own preferred solutions. He satisfied the yearnings of the past rather than anticipating the needs of the future. Even in his own day he was something of a period piece, resisting instinctively the harshnesses of accelerating industrialisation. Thus in place of a definite labour programme he could only ultimately provide reaction and a beguiling jargon. His first term was more distinguished by its scope than its originality, his second was noted for its conservatism.

Wilson's performance was also hampered by glaring personal and organisational limitations in his mode of work. Secretary Lane was one of many men to complain bitterly that Wilson consistently failed to use his cabinet properly as a deliberative body for serious discussion within a few months of starting his first administration. Only occasionally would Wilson have proper discussions with his cabinet, ironic for a man who preached the benefits of full cabinet government in his younger days. Wilson tended to ask for advice from individuals like Colonel House, and as House himself admitted, "as far as I can gather, he confers with none of them (department heads) except in matters concerning their particular department"(56). This caused immense problems when Wilson became incapacitated after his final stroke, leaving the affairs of state in a lamentable condition. MacAdoo confessed to House that he believed his father-in-law was keen to dispense with cabinet meetings altogether! Lane, McReynolds, Lansing, Houston and Gregory were also to voice similar criticisms. Lane talked bitterly of how "for some weeks we have spent our time at cabinet meetings largely telling stories"(56). Once Wilson was ill the whole situation deteriorated into severe bureaucratic infighting as different department heads fought for supremacy. William Wilson and Baker favoured unionism, whereas the department heads in Commerce, Agriculture, Justice and the State Department did not. Clearly, Wilson's inability to listen to advice, to respect and work with

men with whom he might at times disagree determined his relations with his cabinet, and hence the operation of the administration as a whole. Subordinates dealing with problems which fell outside his preoccupations were often distressed at his unwillingness to provide guidance, as William Wilson was to frequently find. Housed in a new and minor department like Labor he received little direct presidential guidance except in moments of crisis. The president simply allowed his department heads to proceed with neither criticism nor guidance. He would frequently ignore them until a crisis forced an issue on to his agenda, having his officers struggle along unaided until then. No detail, however, was too small once he decided an issue was worth his attention. There were thus gradations in the intensity of his commitment. He was also frequently incapable of giving a flexible response and many situations require just that. He was certainly willing to collect pertinent facts from others, but was loath to genuinely solicit opinions, especially from those who by tradition in America were used to voicing one, and that meant that new pressure groups like labour fared most poorly of all. Even when he conferred with legislative leaders his enthusiasm would fall off, if he anticipated a refusal. Thus conferences became merely devices for collecting information rather than for fully exploring other peoples' viewpoints.

House felt "his (Wilson's) chief defect was temperamental"(57). As early as 1914 House confessed to MacAdoo that he was scared that because of Wilson's limitations the administration was in danger of drifting aimlessly towards conservatism, which is in fact what happened. He also felt that Wilson dodged trouble, had unjust prejudices against people and would not confer with people he disliked. House alleged that "no one can see him to explain matters or get his advice .... The President lacks executive ability and does not get the best results from his cabinet or those around him"(58). House was convinced that Wilson never really knew what was happening in any government department at any time, but then Wilson deliberately constricted the contribution his subordinates could make to policy formulation. He knowingly cut off the channels through which guidance usually flows. House called his methods "lonely and inefficient"(59) and insisted that he was also "the most prejudiced man he had ever met"(60). Wilson defended his methods by claiming that "tolerance is an admirable intellectual gift, but it is of little worth in politics. Politics is a war of causes, a joust of principles. Government is too serious a matter to admit to meaningless courtesies"(61), and so in the application of such working methods he left behind him a "trail of broken friendships and a singularly impersonal public reputation"(62). Figures of such marginal importance as William Wilson or Samuel Gompers could thus never have said they knew him or felt they had his full confidence. They

knew so little of him and his thought processes that they could never know how he might act, which consequently left them in an inherently weak position.

During his political career Wilson learnt how to mould his appeal to run along the lines of group and class self-interest, and to resolve class-political conflicts along the lines of existing economic power. In so doing "he ignored the great issue which is slowly coming to the front, the question of economic democracy, abolition of privilege, and securing to men the full fruits of their labor or service .... The issue of political democracy has passed. the issue is now one of industrial or economic democracy"(63), so said George L. Record in March 1919 when commenting on the Wilson presidency, and this is damning criticism from the man credited with converting Wilson to progressivism.

Record urged Wilson to supplement his international programme with an accompanying social democratic programme in America, including in it a demand for the common ownership of public utilities and a limitation on large fortunes. Record's words obliged Wilson to acknowledge that "the world is going to change radically, and I am satisfied that governments will have to do many things which are now left to individuals and corporations .... I am satisfied for instance that the governments will have to take over the great natural resources ... all the water power, all the coal mines, all the oil fields .... They will have to be government owned ... if I should say that outside, people would call me a socialist, but I am not a socialist. And it is because I am not a socialist that I believe these things. I think the only way we can prevent communism is by some action as that"(64). Yet if his private thoughts were evolving from progressivism towards social democracy that fact was never registered in his public policies, he allowed his administration to close in "a riot of reaction"(65). Wilson's head of the Committee of Public Information, George Creel, commented wisely, thus, "what I see - with all my heart I hope I am wrong - is a tragedy of disappointment"(66). A comment that can be used to describe very many of Wilson's political actions, but which is perhaps uniquely correct when examining his dealings with organised labour.

## ENDNOTES

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